

2022

# Support Don't Punish with a Focus on Women



Women and Harm Reduction  
International Network



WHRIN is taking the occasion of August 18, “Never Give Up Day” as apt opportunity to launch the round-up report of support don’t punish with a focus on women, 2022. Never give up day provides a common platform for health and social care organizations and others to redouble determination and connection. WHRIN thus celebrates the impactful resilience and determination of our global community with this summary of some of the actions from 13 countries around the world which galvanise attention on the gendered failure of drug prohibition and urgent demands for reform. (Cover artwork by Isabel Denomme)

## Mauritius - AILES



AILES organised a global day of action for the support don’t punish with a focus on women who use drugs campaign held at its headquarters in Mangalkhan, Mauritius. A focus group discussion was organised with service users. The discussion was on the importance of different advocacy efforts that are in process with regard to harm reduction programmes to be more gender inclusive as well as how to reform repressive drug policy. Training was also provided to NGO staff, other partnering organisations, and community members on overdose management. T-shirts were made with the orange support don’t punish logo for women who use drugs and shared with attendees.

A mini video series was created (with French subtitles) with attendees of the workshop. The videos include the views of [service users](#), [family members](#) of women who use drugs and [other professionals working in the field of harm reduction](#). The videos were disseminated on social media platforms. Additionally, in the future they will be used during various support groups organised with people using drugs, especially for women as well as with their family members.

## Indonesia - Womxn Voice

The Indonesian support don’t punish with focus on women and non-binary people who use drugs campaign carried the theme of ‘*random acts of kindness*’ - to seek support from society for women and non-binary people who use drugs through social interactions held at a public garden (namely Taman Heulang in Bogor City – West Java). Through this action, Womxn’s Voice together with Yayasan Pesona Bumi Pasundan (YPBP) which is also engaged in outreach to people injecting drugs, tried to educate the public regarding the special needs and circumstances of women and nonbinary people





who use drugs negatively impacted by the War On Drugs. By presenting the realities to participants, a spontaneous sense of empathy was sought by asking them to give a love sticker as a symbol of support. Overall Womxn's Voice was delighted that all planned activities achieved awareness raising and network strengthening goals. Exceeding the target of 50 embedded stickers, it was gratifying that 82 signs of love were shown from those who care about the situation. They were very supportive of the issues raised and hoped that there should be more education to the public regarding this situation. They agreed and support that, whatever the social and drug use status, violence is not allowed. Please see this [video](#) covering the event.

### Canada – South Riverdale Community Health Centre - East Toronto Outreach Project

This year the support don't punish with a focus on women action considered how prohibition harms women and non-binary community members, so in the days leading up to the event, the South Riverdale Centre team engaged in conversation about what #supportdontpunish means, how badly drug policy harms us, and what can be done to change it.

Tables and chairs were placed outside and an art based activity was conducted where folks could discuss and write down their thoughts. 2 poster options were printed out so participants could choose "What prohibition harms women means to me" or "What Support Don't Punish" means to me. Colours were used to write responses, photos were taken and music shared during talk about grief and poverty and HIV and Hepatitis C.

Participants were given gift cards to the local grocery store, transit tickets/tokens and were provided with lunch (sandwiches and cookies) and frozen treats to cool down in the hot weather. There were a total of 30 participants and everyone was really pleased about the day and what they learned. The population lives in an area of Toronto far away from the downtown core, so they appreciated having an event as these opportunities do not often happen in their community to come together and give opportunities for growth, discussion and learning!



## Ukraine -Club Eney



With the war in Ukraine, women who use drugs are even more criminalised and reporting cases of violence against them. At the same time, law enforcement systems are now focused on military tasks. Women who use drugs are invisible during war. Club Eney created an advocacy video clip with stories of women activists. Women shared their lived experience stories of women's roles in war conditions, their impact in support of the Ukrainian army, and their experience of volunteering for Ukraine in wartime.

Club Eney coordinated production of bespoke bags filled with campaign materials which were distributed to community activists. The action created opportunity to meet face to face, share experience, and to support each other during this time of adversity. Related social media was promoted through [Youtube](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).







## Malawi - CKPOR

CKPoR Centre for Key Populations Rights hosted support don't punish with a focus on women and non-binary people who use drugs action. The campaign was supported by LGBTIQI people, sex workers and allied organizations. This involved presentations and discussion on how prohibition harms women and ended up with a conclusion that harm reduction services are needed in the country and also that decriminalisation is needed to protect and uphold the rights of women who use drugs. The panel discussion was a way of voicing issues affecting drug users especially on why we need harm reduction services and why humane drug policy is needed to protect and defend the rights of drug users including women and non-binary persons. The press statement was read out and was sent to authorities.

The day showed community solidarity in the collective call for harm reduction services and systems to support gender based violence elimination against women and non-binary people who use drugs. The day also offered an opportunity for HIV and hepatitis testing. Traditional songs and poems were performed by community member's with messages of harm reduction services, human rights and decriminalisation.

## Burundi - BAPUD



25 women who use drugs community members and media participated in the Burundi campaign for support don't punish with a focus on women who use drugs which was celebrated through a brainstorming/dialogue session. Counterproductive governmental responses accentuate the vulnerabilities faced by women affected by the war on drugs.

It is more important than ever to mobilise in solidarity with the most affected communities in general and women in particular to ensure their well-being in crisis situations and, in the long term, to advance drug policy reforms. A formal conversation was conducted about how the campaign works and the different ways to mobilise and show support. After one of the leaders of women drug user community presented the press release to the Burundian press, a powerful brainstorming session followed focusing



on the different challenges that women who use drugs face on a daily basis and the issue of solidarity and coalition building to leave no one behind. Participants were asked to suggest solutions for the well-being of women drug users.

Through invited media, suggestions were developed to be directed to employers, families, law enforcement, and woman in prison, people living in poverty, people living with HIV, people with disabilities, religious leaders, scientific researchers, and people who use drugs living on the streets. The result of this exchange was an incredibly useful list of suggestions that the Burundi network of people who use drugs (BAPUD) will continue to put forward in developing programs for women who use drugs.

### Australia - QuIVAA/QUIHN



Two events were organised with participants to discuss the purpose of the activity and acknowledgement for people who use drugs and their communities, families and individuals who have been harmed due to punitive drug policies. At the Sunshine Coast event, 60 people came including many families. The age range was 3 months to 75 years with approximately 80% women, 5% non-binary and 15% males. A peer woman DJ played during the entire event while a peer non-binary identifying QuIHN employee delivered naloxone trainings across the day. 12 people participated in the training sessions and they each received one naloxone device for free. In addition, the *#itsyourright Hep C campaign promotion team* delivered education, support, production and awareness raising about access to free treatment and testing. A lunch of burgers and soup was provided as well as wellbeing art activities for adults and children throughout the day.

The other event was conducted in Brisbane and was attended by 32 people aged between 30-73, half of whom were women. Again naloxone training and kits were provided. Lunch was gourmet sandwiches and soups. Participants enjoyed a badge making workshop with lots of harm reduction slogans, SDP logos and activist messaging. There was also a harm reduction drug quiz and the winner received a Hi-Ground t-shirt with 'end stigma' messaging.



## South Africa – SANPUD



SANPUD hosted a support don't punish with a focus on women event in collaboration with TBHIVCare who supported the initiative by providing a safe space to host the event at their drop-in centre. SANPUD invited six women who use drugs to participate in the storytelling event, which focused on the following topics: How have prohibitionist laws that govern South Africa negatively impacted women who use drugs?; What obstacles are encountered due to being a woman who uses drugs?; How has harm reduction affected your life? And; What does Support. Don't Punish mean to you?

The goal was to provide a platform for women who use drugs to share their stories about their experiences. This was achieved by explaining that their stories will be used as advocacy tools to raise awareness about harm reduction and its potential to change the lives of people who use drugs. The SANPUD team organised signed consent from willing participants, which helped to establish rapport and create contexts and a safe space for the women to share their stories freely. However, not all participants consented to their photos being taken or stories being recorded but still found an avenue to share their stories amongst women with similar experiences.

The participants received customised prohibition harms women t-shirts, travel reimbursements, refreshments, and a female commodity pack donated by SANPUD, which contained: toothpaste, toothbrush, pads, tampons, soap, perfume, and a pamphlet about gender- based violence with emergency contact numbers.

The stories were posted on the SANPUD website under the “Our Stories” page, and the recorded videos will be posted on the SANPUD YouTube channel to amplify the Prohibition Harms Women slogan. The compilation of these stories will aid SANPUD in efforts to advocate for effective harm reduction services for women who use drugs. Associated social media included facebook posts: [Event setup](#); [Charne's event announcement](#); [Participant's views on SDP](#); on radio: [Bush Radio interview](#); and participant stories: [Warda Gallie](#); and [Wilma Gie](#); [Aquilla Gantsho](#)



## Mexico - Colectiva de Mujeres en Contra de la Guerra de las Drogas (Las Borders-Clinica Wound Clinic

In Mexico, the digital campaign was called 'La Prohibición Daña a las Mujeres' by Colectiva de Mujeres en contra de la Guerra de las Drogas, led by Wound Clinic with collaboration from Las Borders and Veronica V. Participants included Programa Compañeros, ReverdeSer Colectivo, Monserrat Angulo, Drug Policy and Substance Education/Advocacy NGO from Mexico City, Comisión Mexicana de Defensa Y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos Human rights Advocacy and Human Right NGO from Mexico City, and Un solo grupo which is a closed network of 24 individuals from a variety of community based organizations working with marginalised and communities affected by the war on drugs in the Americas, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and US.

An initial planning meeting with the colectiva participants discussed the 2022 campaign and reviewed campaign kit materials to develop feasible actions. The group agreed to create an Instagram Reel in Spanish to post on social media as well as selection of Facebook and Instagram as best platforms to distribute the press statement and present a summary of demands for respect, justice and inclusion for women and non-binary people who use drugs.

During this process a Whatsapp group was created to keep a dynamic communication within our collective and among allies, which remains in use to develop onward planning on how to elicit more participation with women who use drugs, and to organise advocacy for autonomy, demand rights dignity and respect.

A media reel with the press release was created and shared within our collective through each platform participants' Instagram, Tik Tok, [Facebook](#) and Whatsapp. This generated discussion on the need to continued advocacy efforts with women who use drugs and helped to develop a broader advocacy agenda among allies to identify and fully involve women who use drugs with shared values, and a more horizontal structure honed to reality of harm reduction in Latin America.

## Pakistan - Gender and child protection centre



Pakistan has a large heroin consumer market recognising that at least 22% of all people who use drugs are women. Under the Control of Narcotics and Substance Act (CNSA) 1997, possession of 100g and





more of heroin, cocaine or any other opium and coca derivative carries a life term or death sentence and women are disproportionately incarcerated for low level drug offences.

The Gender and Child Protection Centre, works for women, non-binary people and children in Islamabad. The planned activity for support don't punish with a focus on women, 2022 was a group discussion with 23 women who use drugs of whom 11 women gave consent to document their ideas.

The discussion was held in a relaxed environment and it was based on following questions; what does prohibition means to you? how does prohibition effect people?; are prohibition and stigma the same words?; and what are the social impacts of prohibition? The discussion lasted for about 70 minutes.

After the discussion it was concluded that prohibition of affects women very badly. A women in Pakistani society is never alone and due to patriarchy and the dominance of men, they find it difficult to get proper access to services. Women who use drugs are often subject to abuse and violence, both in family and in wider society. The results will be documented and applied in onward advocacy to improve circumstances for women who use drugs in Pakistan.

## Portugal CASO and MUSA.



CASO promoted action in this year's Support. Don't Punish with a focus on women campaign to create a special moment in the engagement of the community of people who use drugs, friends and supporters. MUSA, the mutual support group of women, installed the setting for printing orange t-shirts with stencils and spray for textiles, and assisted everyone choosing a slogan to print on the t-shirts. This was also used as an opportunity for MUSA to organise and plan out details for the public presentation of the CASO/WHRIN Shadow report as presented to the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva last June, with our members and local partners, Externato Sta. Clara, Kosmicare and Saber Compreender.

The public session aimed to promote further discussion among community focusing on the deep and systemic discrimination that affects women who use drugs in Portugal and on follow-up with recommendations to government and institutions. Many of the participating community members



came for the first time to an event hosted by women who use drugs organised to meet the requirements of a public session for collective advocacy. The women of MUSA prepared the venue, arranged refreshments, hosted newcomers and other invitees, read the Portuguese version of the shadow report oral statement, presented some highlights about the process and the shadow report, and discussed issues affecting women who use drugs in Portugal.

### Kenya - Consortia



Campaign Q&A

Women Nest and WARDA commemorated support don't punish day with a focus on women through a collaboration with the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) as a means of strengthening national advocacy. The two organisations took the opportunity to discuss prohibition and associated harms for people who use drugs. This was expounded by experiences shared by women who use drugs. An online campaign was also conducted on social media sites where several messages capturing prohibition were shared through the use of the WHRIN poster. Messages were developed together with women who use drugs.

### India - Misbah

A support don't punish with a focus on women and non-binary people who use drugs event was held at Yamuna Bazar in acknowledgement of the need to change laws and policies that impede access to harm reduction interventions and to promote respect for the human rights of women using drugs.

Misbah invited all the prominent stakeholders including government and non-government organisations to participate. More than 25 women participated in the event. Misbah also invited some resource persons to talk about women rights, Indian drug laws and policies and related harms. WHRIN support don't punish posters were pasted on the walls and T-Shirts worn by all the women participants who shouted out their own slogans. Speakers included a community member who shared a personal story and another member of the community of women who use drugs from the Delhi Users Network who talked about women and gender sensitive harm reduction. Other staff from Misbah spoke about women and human rights, gender equality and drug user friendly policies and programmes. To close the session, a musical performance was held and refreshments shared with a vote of thanks.





Event pictures were shared on social media like – [Facebook](#), Instagram, Whatsaap and Twitter. The program was highly appreciated, receiving more than one thousand likes on social media. After the success of the session, other organisations who attended or who were inspired through social media further utilised printing designs and logos for banners and posters.



*Many thanks to all those who participated in support don't punish with a focus on women 2022. Please share this summary with all who were involved and others to showcase the need to end punitive responses to drug use as part of the movement for gender equality and human rights for all.*

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