



International  
Network of People  
who Use Drugs



# Women who Use Drugs in Kyrgyzstan: Experience of Writing and Working on a CEDAW Shadow Report

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## Introduction

Women who use drugs are an invisible segment of society, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This is due to many factors, the main ones being:

- Criminalisation of the use and/or possession of drugs without the intent to sell<sup>1</sup>;
- Limited access to medical services - only 10% of women have access to medical narcotic drugs<sup>2</sup>;
- Social and structural problems, and the invisibility of groups that are in the minority;
- Recreational drug use substance misuse are addressed through criminal law and psychiatry.
- When applying for a job, certificate stating they are not registered in narcology, and psychiatry is often required. Such certificates are always required when applying to study at a college or a higher educational institution (HEI);
- In countries where gender inequality is strongly expressed and there are harmful practices against women, women who use drugs are especially susceptible to stigma and discrimination and are persecuted as “super bad” women.

Therefore, it is important to participate in human rights mechanisms based on Conventions ratified by States by submitting “shadow reports”, also known as “alternative reports”. For women, the Committee on the

Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a human rights mechanism where women who use drugs can participate in the submission of shadow reports covering a variety of human rights issues. This will help make women visible to the State, who undertake to follow the articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The main reason we continue to participate in the submission of reports is because human rights violations and the overall worsening situation for of women who use drugs is becoming a bigger problem that drives women who use drugs underground and negatively affects their health and lives.

The purpose of this case study is to consolidate the experience of Asteria – the principal organisation led by and serving women who use drugs in Kyrgyzstan - with the CEDAW Shadow Reporting and Participation process. Organisations and leaders of informal associations of women who use drugs, after reading this document, should hopefully:

- ✓ Be inspired to write a CEDAW shadow report;
- ✓ Get practical advice in the preparation, writing and planning of post-advocacy actions related to the shadow report;
- ✓ Receive guidance regarding security, potential risks, empowerment, etc., having analysed how certain points are applicable to one's own situation.

<sup>1</sup> Drug Decriminalisation: Progress or Political Red Herring? (International Network of People who Use Drugs, 2021). <https://inpud.net/drug-decriminalisation-progress-or-political-red-herring-2>

<sup>2</sup> The World Drug Report 2021. (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html>

## Preparation and Data

We submitted the first Alternative Report in 2015, starting by collecting data on violence among women who use drugs. The findings of this study were shocking - 80% of women who use drugs experienced violence from the police and intimate partners, which is 20% more than among the general population. This data came from a rapid screening intervention for women who use drugs on violence – known as the “Wings of Hope” project<sup>3</sup>. In addition to quantitative data, we also used community case studies.

We prepared the submission and writing of an alternative report to CEDAW in a coalition of two more communities of women: Labrys (working with the LGBT community) and Tais Plus (working with sex workers).

Collecting, analysing and interpreting data requires resources and a responsible approach. If there are ready-made results of the collected data, such as studies, analytical reviews, screenings or express assessments, then it is good to use them. When there are no ready-made new studies available, data can be collected from various sources that directly, and in some cases indirectly, affect the issues of rights of women who use drugs, including organisational reports, quantitative and qualitative data reviews (including monitoring assessments, case studies, etc). The cases that we used, for instance, were cases from our work providing services for women who use drugs since we are a service provider, which most clearly shows the problem of violation of women's rights according to the CEDAW article.

A review or analysis of legislative documents is also recommended, to identify gaps that hinder access to assistance for women who use drugs. Articles in the media are a very important resource for collecting data on discriminatory statements, initiatives and other articles that highlight or publicise discrimination against women who use drugs.

It is also important to meet with women who use drugs receiving harm reduction services and discuss recommendations with them, ensuring the interpretation of a particular recommendation is correct. Involving other organisations from the community of women who use drugs who may also have relevant data (or self-organisation of the community of drug users, where women also participate) is a useful step to take. Meetings or phone calls with partner organisations that are also from the community of women who use drugs or work with women who use drugs is a good source of information. It helps in the exchange of knowledge, problems and recommendations.

It is possible that partner organisations outside the community have also published studies or reports and can be good to talk with if, for example, there is data on documenting human rights violations from their projects.

Overall, if your organisation is a service provider or program implementer itself, the process of data collection becomes easier. If this not the case, it is important for the data collection process to build partnerships with organisations in the community of women who use drugs that provide services, in order to have access and use first-hand data on a regular basis.

If resources are limited in terms of being able to develop your own data-collection tools and

<sup>3</sup> Wings of Hope Project (Astoria, Global Health Center of Central Asia and Open Society Foundation, 2012)  
<https://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/wingsofhope/about/>

methods of data collection, then the sources described above will allow you to choose the most appropriate method to source secondary data.

## Results of the Submission of the 2015 and 2021 Shadow Reports

In 2015, the main recommendation of the CEDAW shadow report from the community of women who use drugs was to "Implement Minimum Standards for Crisis Centres with a non-discriminatory approach", formulated based on the following problems:

- violence and harassment by the police;
- exclusion from treatment programmes and crisis centres due to drug use;
- lack of access to contemporary health services with many still operating according to outdated schemes from Soviet times.

In 2018, when there were only non-state crisis and prevention centres operating in the country, we entered into partnership with crisis centres and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development to develop minimum standards which are now used by the Association of Crisis Centres. Since 2019, all non-governmental crisis centres have been operating according to these standards.

The next session of CEDAW was to be held in the first quarter of 2020, and the submission of reports opened at the end of 2019. Due to the pandemic, the dates were postponed. In 2020, it was possible to submit updated data in connection with restrictive measures in connection with the pandemic, as a separate supplement. From this we submitted updates to the previous report regarding problems related to the lockdown, with various restrictions, lack of access to food, humanitarian aid, online education for children, and so on.

The opportunity to speak directly at the next session of the CEDAW Committee was rescheduled for both States and civil society to Autumn 2021. This made it possible to make updates by the time of the session itself in the form of an updated Shadow Report from 2021, containing mainly the information that took place the previous year due to the political reform in Kyrgyzstan. This included changes to the Constitution and the governance structure, as well as a presidential decree issued on an inventory of laws which led to many new and additional problems in relation to key groups of women.

In 2015 three community organisations were working in partnership, but by 2019 the number of those wishing to join the informal coalition working to submit a common Shadow Report increased and acquired a name – 'CEDAW Informal Coalition on Women with Intersecting Forms of Discrimination'. Of the 17 NGOs in this informal coalition, there were only three organisations from the community of women who use drugs (Asteria, Ganesha, Network of Key Communities of Women) along with one national network of people who use drugs (The Harm Reduction Network).

Community organisations are the most useful in both collecting information and making recommendations, as they are directly related to both the group of beneficiaries and the problems of the group.

The role of partner organisations outside the community of women who use drugs is also important and plays a significant role in that they may have research or a database of documented cases, because the organisations from the community of women who use drugs in Kyrgyzstan, as a rule, rarely receive long-term projects for research, and are rather engaged for consultations, interviews and to provide access to the groups of beneficiaries.

The 2021 process consisted of the following steps:

1. Update of the report in Autumn 2021 for Kyrgyzstan (each country has its own dates listed on the [CEDAW website](#)).
2. Data collection, analysis, discussions with the community of women who use drugs.
3. Discussions with filing partners.
4. Search for financial or technical resources for specific tasks and possible activities.
5. Submission of a shadow report, preparation of a joint speech from four communities of women with intersecting forms of discrimination.
6. Speech at a lunch briefing in constructive dialogue with NGOs (oral statement - an official event available to everyone, including States).
7. An oral presentation during an online platform for all NGOs who submitted a shadow report, organised by International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW).

Our informal coalition was given 5.5 minutes, and we agreed on 1.5 minutes for each community of women, adjusting the text of the speech to fit the time for the speaker. We chose the speaker by popular vote. After the lunch briefing, we prepared written responses to Committee members' questions and included follow-ups (short-term recommendations for 2 years), with proposals for concrete actions to solve the problem with regards to our beneficiary groups of women.

Alternative Reports by Year, Periodic State Reports, Questions and Answers to Questions are available on the [UN Treaty Body Database](#).

<sup>4</sup> Animated educational materials from IWRAW:  
[https://www.iwraw-ap.org/search-resources/?\\_sft\\_resource\\_language=russian&\\_sft\\_resource\\_type=cedaw-quick-concise](https://www.iwraw-ap.org/search-resources/?_sft_resource_language=russian&_sft_resource_type=cedaw-quick-concise)  
Reports and guides from IWRAW for NGOs on participation in CEDAW sessions: <https://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/>

Top issues for women who use drugs in 2021:

- Lack of access to healthcare, increased persecution of participants in the methadone program at methadone dispensing points;
- Lack of access to buprenorphine and all types of methadone in tablet form, including in pharmacies as a prescription drug, and to this end, to include health-related recommendations on the treatment of drug users in general therapy;
- Monitoring the media and public space for discrimination, so as not to demonise women who use drugs, thereby creating more and more barriers for us.

## Changes In the Process

The rules and procedures for submitting reports to the Committee are practically unchanged, and with the open access anyone can get acquainted with various manuals in Russian and English.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there are materials on key groups of women. It should be noted that in rare cases, an innovation may be introduced. So, for example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, participation in the sessions of the Committee took place online for both the participating States and civil society organisations. In 2021, online meetings were attended offline by the civil sector and by members of government delegations. Also in 2021, the format of the so-called **follow-up recommendations**, which occur every two years was introduced. This means that during an informal virtual lunch briefing, civil society had the opportunity to submit short-term and attainable recommendations for the State, to be implemented within 2 years after the Final Recommendations of the Committee.

NGO reporting guidelines on CEDAW & rights of women who use drugs from IWRAW: <https://www.iwraw-ap.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/NGO-Reporting-Guidelines-on-CEDAW-Rights-of-Women-who-Use-Drugs.pdf>

## Post Advocacy

Follow-up advocacy is a new but equally important and significant process. During the month next month after the session, the Committee prepares the Final Recommendations. The short-term recommendations play a primary role and as soon as recommendations are published on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), it is necessary to start analysing them in relation to their problems, accurate translation and building a strategy for further advocacy. This is a tool that will help us start a dialogue and build a process of cooperation with the state to eliminate problems and barriers that violate the rights of women who use drugs. Thanks to the recommendations, many existing problems are brought to the forefront and become visible. If earlier it was possible for the state to "brush aside" and ignore the problems, the recommendations make it easier to influence the decision-makers. If this is a problem in the field of justice, then direct or indirect negotiations with the Ministry of Internal Affairs can be conducted.

In addition, the Committee's recommendations can be used to address stigma and discrimination. Here you can work with many ministries and departments, such as the media, to ensure that discriminatory and stereotypical expressions and terminology are excluded from articles and reports. In addition, at all levels of government structures, demand the replacement of discriminatory terminology in all national documents against women who use drugs, in accordance with the recommendations of The International Narcotics Control Board<sup>5</sup> and the Pompidou Expert Group<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2020. (INCB, 2020).  
[https://unis.unvienna.org/pdf/2021/INCB/INCB\\_Report\\_R.pdf](https://unis.unvienna.org/pdf/2021/INCB/INCB_Report_R.pdf)

After the Final Recommendations in 2015, the process of change is still underway and will continue. If the State has not implemented the recommendations from previous reports, they are included in the new ones as a continuation of work.

Here are examples based on the results of the first report from 2015:

- **National Action Plan** for the implementation of the CEDAW recommendations from 2017.
- **The Ombudsman's Plan for 2016-2020**, namely the Action Plan of the Department of Protection against Domestic Violence and Gender Discrimination.
- **Clinical guidelines** for obstetricians/gynaecologists on the management of pregnancy in women who use drugs.
- **Strategic action plan** to overcome legal barriers to HIV and tuberculosis services in Kyrgyz Republic 2020-2025.

## Final Recommendations

On November 15, 2021, the **Final Recommendations for Kyrgyzstan** were made public. The recommendations are typically broad on all counts, focusing mainly on the report of the State itself, but the Committee always considers information submitted by NGOs. For example, when they ask questions to members of a state delegation, they may refer to an "alternative source". Information from an "alternative source" is not referencing a Shadow Report but could be a speech made during the lunch briefing, or answers to the Committee members in writing after the lunch briefing.

<sup>6</sup> *Opioid Agonist Treatment. Guiding Principles for legislation and regulations.* (Pompidou Group, 2017).  
<https://rm.coe.int/2017-ppg-15-oat-guidingprinciples-final-eng/16808b6d9e>

For future reference, read the entire text carefully and select those recommendations that are applicable to women who use drugs or to organisations from the community. Comparing the provided data with the recommendations will help you quickly develop your plan. You can use recommendations on different articles of the Convention but build plans according to priorities and available resources. The rest of the analysis will be useful in any case because organisations constantly participate in meetings and events around various areas, and it is important to use the topical recommendations made on those platforms.

### Analysis on the CEDAW Final Recommendations

1. First, we note the global, long-term plans for further advocacy based on the Committee's recommendations. To do this, we need to review the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Kyrgyzstan's report on the SDGs, and develop steps to integrate women who use drugs into the indicators of achievement.
2. Then, we try to apply the global goals at the National level and tie them together. The Committee invites the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan (*Jogorku Kenesh*)<sup>7</sup>, in accordance with its mandate, to take the necessary steps to implement these concluding provisions until the next periodic report, submitted in 4 years, in accordance with the Convention. An interim report can also be submitted after 2 years. In any case, working with the coordinating ministry on the implementation of the recommendations from the very beginning is important to stay in the course and be aware of the implementation plans right away.
3. In Kyrgyzstan, the responsible department for the implementation of the

recommendations is the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (in 2021 it was merged with the Ministry of Health, then they were divided, but the powers for social development remained). Usually, these are national strategies, programs that include an action plan. These are relevant in our case:

- ✓ The Fifth National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2018–2020), the main National Document that outlines the plan for the implementation of the CEDAW Recommendations.
- ✓ The 2018 Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security; as well as Sustainable Development Goals (which, in principle, include the implementation of National Programs).

These guidelines provide a lot of room for further work, which often cannot be fully funded by a single project. Therefore, it is important to focus on one or two issues at the most. It will require active participation (collection of information, evidence about the problems / developing arguments, negotiations with donors for funding, etc.) and ignoring will play against your organisation, affecting your reputation, your capacity to build a constructive dialogue and partnership. Based on the results of the speech at CEDAW, we compared the final recommendations of the Committee with those submitted by our coalition in the report. Based on this comparative analysis, we saw that a large part of our proposals were taken into account and included in the CEDAW report.

Final Committee recommendations	Our recommendations included by the Committee
<p><b>The legislative framework.</b></p> <p><b>The Committee is concerned:</b></p> <p>a) that the Act on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women <b>does not cover intersecting forms of discrimination and that the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law is delayed</b>; as well as</p> <p>b) about the reliance on <b>legally vague terms</b> of morality, ethics and traditional family values in the context of an ongoing large-scale inventory of legislation that can be used to infringe on women's rights.</p> <p><b>10.</b> The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations from 2018 (CEDAW/C/KGZ/CO/4, para. 10) and recommends that the State adopts comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation with a definition of discrimination against women that covers direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, and <b>intersecting forms of discrimination</b> in accordance with article 1 of the Convention.</p> <p><b>The Committee also recommends</b> that the State party ensure that:</p> <p>a) the list of legislative acts and the corresponding amendments to them cancel all discriminatory provisions, including those based on the terms of morality, ethics and traditional family values not defined in the law; as well as</p> <p>b) the inventory should be carried out in accordance with the State party's obligations under the Convention and other human rights treaties and should be carried out in consultation with civil society organizations, including women's organizations.</p>	<p>"Provide an enabling environment for drug harm reduction programs that promote unhindered access to health care, ensure that cases of police violence are properly investigated, ensure that drug use without the intent to sell is not prosecuted, and ensure that <b>public spaces are monitored</b> to curb discriminatory terminology and propaganda."</p>
<p><b>Stereotypes</b></p> <p><b>20.</b> The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/KGZ/CO/4, para. 16) and <b>recommends</b> that the State party:</p> <p>b) continue raising awareness among media professionals to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes and objectification of women, and to promote a positive portrayal of women as active drivers of development in the media. In addition, revise the Law on Public Broadcasting to ensure a gender approach in the consideration and <b>monitoring of media content</b> by TV channels, including KTRK.</p>	<p>"Do not use discriminatory terminology in relation to women who use drugs and fix this in regulatory documents. States as well as the International Narcotics Board urge not to use the terminology of drug abuse, because it constitutes discrimination that contributes to punitive practices and the promotion of demonisation of drug use. Using discriminatory terminology enables both, the media and government officials and business communities that dominate in the public Internet space to spread discriminatory information."</p>

<p><b>Violence and harmful practices</b></p> <p><b>22.</b> Recalling its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee <b>recommends</b> that the State party:</p> <p><b>a)</b> revise the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence to cover all forms of gender-based violence and take into account the special needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women, including women with disabilities, migrant women, women living with HIV / AIDS, women who use drugs and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women;</p> <p><b>g) strengthen victim support and protection services, including 24-hour hotlines, adequate shelters, medical care, psychosocial counseling and economic support throughout the State party;</b></p> <p><b>(i)</b> bring to account and adequately punish those responsible for cases of gender-based violence, arbitrary detention and attacks against women belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, women who use drugs, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.</p>	<p>"Among women who use drugs, not having a passport is still a problem. Because there is no effective mechanism of identification, without the institute of "propiska" (registration according to place of living). If a woman or her relatives do not have real estate, then she does not have registration at the place of residence. And she won't get a passport. This immediately closes access to many things for herself and her children. Without a passport, she cannot enroll children in schools, kindergartens, she cannot claim allowances, seek legal work and healthcare."</p>
<p><b>Employment</b></p> <p><b>h)</b> improve <b>access to employment</b> and training opportunities for <b>disadvantaged and marginalized groups</b> of women, such as ethnic minority women, women with disabilities and migrant women</p>	
<p><b>Health</b></p> <p><b>36.</b> The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health, and recommends that the State party:</p> <p><b>c)</b> <b>fight corruption in the health care system and gender-based violence and discrimination by health personnel</b>, especially against women who use drugs, women with HIV / AIDS and women in prostitution;</p> <p><b>Disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women</b></p> <p><b>41.</b> The Committee is <b>concerned</b> that older women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minority groups, refugees and women seeking asylum, migrant women, women living with HIV/AIDS, <b>women who use drugs</b> as well as lesbian, bisexual and transgender women <b>continue to face intersecting forms of discrimination</b> in the State party.</p> <p><b>42.</b> The Committee <b>recommends</b> that the State party take <b>targeted measures</b> to ensure <b>access</b> to justice, employment and <b>health care</b>,</p>	<p>"Access to methadone programs is limited due to the presence of police around methadone points."</p> <p>Our information in the responses after the lunch briefing:</p> <p>"Access to methadone programs is limited due to the presence of police around methadone points."</p>

including sexual and reproductive health services, while respecting patient confidentiality, social protection and food security for disadvantaged groups of women, and <b>taking into account their specific needs.</b>	
<p><b>Women who use drugs</b></p> <p><b>45.</b> The Committee is concerned about draft legislative amendments criminalizing the possession of drugs for personal use and the lack of access to harm reduction programs and facilities for women who use drugs.</p> <p><b>46.</b> The Committee <b>recommends</b> that the State party:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a)</b> ensure that possession of drugs for personal use without intent to sell is not a criminal offense;</li><li><b>c)</b> improve the access to harm reduction programs and opportunities for women who use drugs.</li></ul>	<p>"In 2020, the country was in lockdown, the borders were closed, however, the figures of crime and offenses committed is higher than in 2019."</p> <p>"It turns out that there is no rehabilitation and alternative types of punishment, state lawyers accompanying the entire process completely free of charge is missing, protection of witnesses and protection of victims from police officers is also missing. But law enforcement methods have increased significantly."</p> <p>Recommendation: Provide drug rehabilitation and treatment instead of punishment.</p> <p>On para. 46 c) we provided this information:</p> <p>"In addition to the shifts at the methadone dispensing points by police officers, access to opioid analgesics excludes a group of women associated with a substance use disorder. This discriminates and denies access at the state level. Methadone, buprenorphine - must be available in any form of administration and route of administration (tablet form with various dosages), not only for oncology, but also for disorders associated with the use of psychoactive substances."</p> <p><b>"We urge the Committee on the Elimination of All Activities to recommend that the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic provide an enabling environment for drug use harm reduction programs that promote unimpeded access to health care, and prohibit police harassment at methadone dispensing points."</b></p>

## Final Recommendations

The process of submitting a shadow report is challenging but interesting work. As in any important process, we faced difficulties but tried to find solutions and compromises. For ourselves, we have learned the following lessons:

### Joint submission of reports with other organisations.

In general, it was a rather positive experience working on a joint submission with sex workers and women from LGBT groups because:

- Timely and consistent preparation was made for the submission of the shadow report;
- Deadlines of all stages of work were met by all groups;
- The experience of partners taking the initiative helps to free up time and resources while also reducing pressure.

The funding model can be a drawback - if just one of the partners receives funding aimed at the process of writing an alternative report, then they have obligations to the donor. Initiatives such as joint submission should be well thought out and should not be tied to a single organisation. Therefore, long-term projects for a coalition of different organisations are not an option if the budget is not allocated to each organisation.

### Participation of non-national NGOs

NGOs such as regional associations or international organisations can help inexperienced organisations understand the CEDAW process, as well as translate key documents in the local and Russian language. They can pay for a translator for an online session, or they can pay for experts from within their communities.

The downside is that there is a top-down approach, and it is perceived by national, local organisations as being an unequal partnership and unprofessional. This position usually leads to rejection by local/national communities. If you work on a joint submission, then you need to define the roles of participation, communication and expectations very clearly from each organisation.

### Oral presentation

This is a speech in which you describe the positive developments that have occurred in the country, and then point out what went wrong. This is a very important speech which can be published and used in the proceeding advocacy work. Also, this is a good opportunity in terms of capacity building.

We had to follow the exact text of the speech, as there are different communities of women and competition between the community the various stakeholders in the community. For instance, by lumping all the problems of different communities (women who use drugs, sex workers, women living with HIV, transgender women) into one heap, we blur the needs of specific barriers and their solutions. Therefore, it is important to keep track of the text as it will change during the writing process within the allotted time for the oral statement. The main thing is to keep what is most important at the centre. There are no compromises when we do something that will affect all women who use drugs in Kyrgyzstan. Do no harm and ensure safety. Any incorrect interpretation distorts the essence.

***Be strong and courageous in your decisions and actions, respecting the principle of “do no harm” and keeping women who use drugs safe!***

## Oral Presentation from Women who Use Drugs, 2021

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to represent here the community of women who use drugs. Our priority issues are related to discrimination, lack of access to health care and lack of access to justice

### DISCRIMINATION

The state adopts new legislation that negatively affects the rights of women who use drugs, has punitive policies that hinder access to justice, health care, employment, education, and intensifies hatred towards women who use drugs. At the same time, during the period of independence of Kyrgyzstan, the Law aimed at protection against discrimination has never been adopted. It turns out that there are punitive norms, but there are no protective ones.

This allows discriminatory propaganda to be carried out by both the media and government officials and business communities that dominate the public Internet space. Not using discriminatory terminology is something that the Board on Narcotics in its 2020 Country Report urges countries, for example, to not use terminology like “abuse” of drugs because it encourages punitive practices, demonisation and harassment of women who use drugs.

### LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

The State supports evidence-based approaches to healthcare. The Methadone program has been available in the country since 2002, but women still have less access to it than men. WHO recommends methadone as the gold standard of care for pregnant women who are dependent on opioids. But discriminatory propaganda and “harassment” against women who use drugs directly hinders access to both methadone and health care in

general and forces them to go even deeper underground.

### LACK OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The state does not recognise widespread violence and discrimination against women who use drugs. The punitive discourse perpetuated by the media and those in power, private medical institutions fuels conditions of higher vulnerability to violence and discrimination from various state and non-state actors.

In 2020, the country was in lockdown, the borders were closed, however the number of people who committed crimes and offenses related to drugs was higher than in 2019. In January-April 2021, an even more significant increase in the number of crimes related to drug trafficking was registered, by more than 43% than the possession of drugs without the intent to sell them.

Summing up, there is no rehabilitation available for people who use drugs; there are no alternative types of punishment, there are no state paid lawyers accompanying the process free of charge, there is no protection for witnesses, and there is no protection from police misconduct either. A sharp bias in all institutions - in the punitive direction, which affects all women in general, but women who use drugs - in particular.

We urge the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination to recommend the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic provide an enabling environment for drug harm reduction programs that promote unhindered access to health care, ensure that police violence is properly investigated, that drug use is not prosecuted, and that public spaces are monitored to suppress discriminatory terminology and propaganda.

Thank You.

**Asteria** is an organisation representing the community of women who use drugs in Kyrgyzstan, founded in 2007. Asteria operates a service centre for women who use drugs which provides temporary accommodation, shelter for victims of gender-based violence, condom and syringe exchange point, social support, training and other services. Asteria works on a peer-to-peer basis has been advocating at different levels of government since 2007, always in the interest of the community of women who use drugs.

**The International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD)** is a global peer-based organisation that seeks to promote the health and defend the rights of people who use drugs. INPUD will expose and challenge stigma, discrimination, and the criminalisation of people who use drugs, and their impact on the drug-using community's health and rights. INPUD will achieve this through processes of empowerment and advocacy at the international level, while supporting empowerment and advocacy at community, national and regional levels.

Asteria and INPUD are very grateful for financial support from the Bridging the Gaps II Programme (2016 – 2020).

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