



European Union
Statement on the occasion of the
Intersessional Meeting of the 59th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs
Vienna,
10 October 2016

Topic: Availability of and access to controlled substances

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

Ensuring appropriate access to, and use of controlled substances for medical treatment while minimising their misuse is a difficult balancing act for society to achieve. Yet it is also an essential task in order to reduce pain and suffering across the globe. The need to have access to essential drugs is also prominent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and embedded in several legal instruments in the context of the World Health Assembly. The rational use of opioids, mainly in the area of pain treatment, is indeed essential to health. Given the possible negative effects of misuse, or trafficking an adequate balance between provision and control is required.

However, the availability and access to these substances is not achieved in many countries: recent data show that up to 75 percent of the world population has no access to proper pain medication. This situation induces unnecessary pain and suffering worldwide and is unacceptable. The UNGASS outcome document rightfully stresses several operational recommendations to tackle the range of existing barriers. Reviewing legislation, strengthening national control systems and stimulating capacity building and training for health professionals are some of the measures that have shown to be effective.

The availability for opioid medication for the control of pain varies across Europe. A European study called Access to Opioid Medications in Europe (ATOME) undertook applied research to assess the barriers for access to opioid medicines for moderate to severe pain and for the

treatment of opioid dependence in twelve Member States. The project developed tailor made recommendations to address these barriers and contributed to the revision of the WHO policy guidelines on controlled substances.

Technical guidance to tackle existing barriers is of utmost importance, especially for low and middle income countries. In this regard the EU welcomes the support of WHO, UNODC and INCB. It stresses the relevance of the WHO guidance report on ensuring balance in national policies on controlled substances, the INCB 2015/2016 reference report on ‘Availability of Internationally Controlled Drugs: Ensuring Adequate Access for Medical and Scientific Purposes. Indispensable, adequately available and not unduly restricted’, and the WHO/UNODC/UICC joint program on increasing access to controlled medicines for medical purposes. It also highlights the important role and knowledge of civil society in this area. Several EU Member States have started to contribute to concrete projects and programs by UNODC, WHO, UICC and the INCB with the aim of improving the availability of and access to controlled medicines in low and middle income countries.

The EU would like to encourage all states to further implement the operational recommendations as agreed in the UNGASS outcome document in order to fulfill one of the core commitments agreed upon on the international level.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.