



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,  
regional and international levels of all  
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial  
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the  
world drug problem**

## **Statement submitted by Dianova International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* [E/CN.7/2022/1](#).

\*\* Issued without formal editing.



## **Putting the focus on children whose parents use drugs**

The situation of children of people having a problematic use of alcohol or other drugs is an issue that has not received the attention it deserves. Drug use is on the rise worldwide, affecting not only users but also their families, and interfering with children's well-being and human rights. Children who live with drug using or dependent parents are more likely to develop a range of health, social, physical and psychological problems. Moreover, parents who are struggling with substance use disorders often have difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities towards their child due to their situation of social vulnerability, that can directly impact the quality of life of children.

It is therefore critical to find new ways to improve the situation of these "silent victims" of substance use, including through designing adequate prevention programmes, integrating the children's rights perspective within addiction services, coordinating public services, or making policy changes that could bring about a positive impact on children.

Dianova, an organization working at the grass-roots and advocacy level, would like to raise awareness on this topic, and would like to contribute to the debate. To this end, Dianova conducted a survey to gather information on how children's needs are being addressed in adult addiction services; this survey was followed by the publication of a report and an infographic based on its main outcomes. Lastly, in 2021 a webinar was organized to address this issue.

At the CND65, Dianova is organizing a side event on "Parents and Families Affected by Parental Drug Use: Current Gaps and Promising Practices" to shed light on this topic.

### **Need to engage addiction services in the protection of children's rights**

Addiction services, such as harm reduction or treatment programmes, have proved effective in addressing the needs of people who use drugs, however it is not clear whether they are capable of providing clients' children with the interventions they need. These services need to adapt to the realities of each person, this is why it is now established that a gender-sensitive approach ought to be developed to address the specific needs of women. In the same manner, it appears necessary to look at how addiction services take children's rights into account, and find ways to promote the children's rights perspective in these services.

While drug use can have a negative impact on parenting capabilities, addiction services seldom address this issue directly. Many services have no identified protocol to assess risk situations for children and interventions remain focused on adults (adult-centred approach).

It is important to note that most parents who misuse alcohol and other drugs have the well-being of their children at heart. They need to be aided by non-stigmatizing addiction services that develop effective approaches grounded in a systemic perspective.

Furthermore, addictions services should endeavour to train their staff in adopting a children's rights approach to intervention.

### **A challenge for professionals: protecting the rights of children and supporting their parents in treatment**

Addiction professionals can be reluctant to inquire about their beneficiaries' children. This can be due to their fear of damaging their therapeutic relationship with parents, or of being subject to potential retaliations should a situation of child maltreatment be revealed. Also, many addiction professionals lack training in this field, or they may believe that they should primarily focus on drugs.

**Mainstreaming the gender perspective in addiction services: a long way to go**

Prejudices among addiction professionals persist when addressing the parenting skills of their beneficiaries. While men are generally less involved than women in child rearing responsibilities, they tend to be much more praised for doing so. Conversely, while they are the primary caregivers, women are often more blamed for their drug use or dependence.

Developing a gender-based perspective in addiction services entails that the rights of children can be better protected and promoted.

**It is not only about identifying violations of children's rights but also about responding quickly and efficiently to these violations**

While many addiction professionals have been trained to assess the risks faced by children, too **few initiatives** are taken to promote the protection of children.

Faced with a situation a child maltreatment, professionals may be **reluctant to react** due to their fear of the reaction of those involved, their ignorance of circuits, or the lack of institutional support.

**The way forward for addiction services**

Dianova recommends to:

- Consider the children's rights perspective in adult addiction services in terms of design and implementation.
- Improve the training and supervision of professionals.
- Establish parenting support as a core aspect of the treatment plan.
- Systematically include the children exposed to parental substance use and their situation in data collection.
- Consider stigma as the leading cause of the reluctance of parents to talk about their children; find appropriate strategies; and avoid stigmatizing interventions that only serve to keep child abuse situations secret.
- Base all attempts to improve families' and children's situation on the empowerment of individuals, families and communities.

**Protecting the rights of children affected by parental substance use**

Drug policies are highly complex and interconnected. Therefore, we call on Member States and the CND to take into account the situation of these children when analysing the world drug problem and to consider the repercussions of related policies.

It is high time to focus on the rights of children exposed to parental substance use.

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