



## **2022 UNODC-WHO Informal Scientific Network Meeting**

### **“Substance Use Prevention and Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Care for Girls and Women”**

Oral statement delivered on 17 March 2022 to the  
UNODC Commission on Narcotic Drugs

The UNODC-WHO Informal Scientific Network is calling for the increased implementation of evidence-based and humane policies and strategies for preventing substance use and treating substance use disorders among women and girls.

Girls and boys have different developmental trajectories with overlapping as well as unique vulnerability and resilience factors associated with distinct substance use patterns and risks for developing substance use disorders. While globally one in three people who uses drugs is a woman - with trends indicating an increase in females - only one in six people treated for drug use disorders is a woman. The COVID pandemic has increased emotional distress and exacerbated social and economic challenges with concomitant rises in substance use, and women and girls are among the most affected. Overall, for the same amount of substance consumed, women have worse health and social consequences including higher rates of infectious and mental health disorders, homelessness, stigmatization, incarceration and violence.

UNODC and WHO have summarized a list of effective preventions in their *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention*, and of treatments in their *International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders*. However, few women and girls benefit from these interventions and much more needs to be done to increase accessibility.



The UNODC-WHO Informal Scientific Network makes the following recommendations:

1. Eliminate **all forms of discrimination and stigma** against girls and women with substance use disorders and against treatment providers. Substance use disorders are health disorders and best addressed through a biopsychosocial health response.
2. Enhance **workforce development** to provide effective training to support prevention and treatment of substance use disorders for girls and women.
3. Implement effective **prevention and health promotion** for girls and women of all ages, that benefit them equally to their male counterparts.
4. Avail adequate resources for the effective prevention and **treatment of substance use disorders** for women and girls, including pregnant women and women in the criminal justice system, along a continuum of care, and across the lifespan to close the prevailing treatment gap.
5. Invest in **research** to increase our understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with substance use in girls and women, and the most effective prevention and treatment strategies in different socioeconomic contexts.
6. Promote and evaluate **gender-sensitive policies** to address substance use that allow for the provision of public health and human-rights based treatment interventions for women with substance use disorders.

For the interest of time, a fuller statement will be shared with the Secretariat.