

Good afternoon,

My name is Maria Angelica Comis, Coordinator of the *É de Lei* drop-in centre.

É de Lei is a non-profit civil society organisation that, since 1998, has promoted harm reduction in relation to drug use.

Our actions are aimed at affirming and defending the human rights and citizenship of people who use drugs, especially in situations of vulnerability.

É de Lei is the first drop-in center for people who use drugs in Brazil.

Our work consists of four pillars:

- Strategic and operational management
- Teaching and research
- Communications and advocacy
- Harm reduction practice.

When it comes to the latter, our drop-in center offers a space for exchanges and support, guidance and referrals to other key services for people who use drugs.

Our outreach work engages people who use different drugs in a broad range of contexts to encourage notions of self-support as well as to develop harm reduction and prevention strategies that respond to their realities.

In this sense, we work, for instance, with environments of leisure, with people who are homeless, and with women.

In the context of the pandemic, we have observed a worsening of the situations of vulnerability experienced by homeless people and people who use drugs.

Being one of the few civil society organisations that continued to carry out activities despite pandemic-related restrictions, we noticed a significant gap in access to information related to COVID-19 prevention.

We also noticed that the strategies and restrictions implemented by public authorities did not take into account the situation of homeless people. How does one shelter at home when one doesn't have a home? How to wash one's hands with soap and water when one doesn't even have access to drinkable water?

To respond to these challenges, so far, we have produced and distributed information leaflets with specific strategies for homeless people.

We have used novel technologies, like using large-scale projectors to showcase crucial and accessible health and safety information onto building walls in the city center.

We have affixed posters on city walls, to help street-based people navigate where to find water and food.

We have also distributed basic supplies to protect health and prevent coronavirus transmissions.

The situation has been dire in my country.

Brazil has the second largest number of deaths by COVID-19 in the world.

It goes without saying that responses to the pandemic need to consider racial and economic disparities, that condition the capacity to abide by confinement rules.

Our national political context also poses challenges in terms of civil society participation.

Despite prior progress in that regard, the National Drug Policy Council no longer provides space for the participation of civil society.

The voices of populations most affected by drug policies are side-lined in the development of the said policies.

In addition, there have been changes in the direction of drug policies and harm reduction services are being stigmatized and have lost funding.

As we have increased our outreach, more and more people have come to our harm reduction teams to seek support in taking care of themselves, and to procure hygiene products, as well as harm reduction.

That said, there have also been opportunities for new encouraging partnerships:

- The #LoveExists (#ExisteAmor) campaign, developed by musicians Criolo and Milton Nascimento, have raised funds to support street-based people during the pandemic.
- Our partnership with the International Drug Policy Consortium and the Elton John AIDS Foundation, has allowed us to provide protective and harm reduction supplies to street-based people.
- And our participation in remote webinars have allowed us to reach new audiences to raise awareness of the positive impact of harm reduction and to inspire others with the lessons that we have learnt.

Our work supporting communities in the street has, thus, been complemented by building new productive partnerships online.

Despite it all, we will continue to fight for health, prevention and to guarantee the rights of all people.

Thank you