



Factsheet 1

A BALANCED APPROACH TO THE WORLD DRUG PROBLEM IS A FUNDAMENTAL AND STRATEGIC PRINCIPLE

Nearly three quarters of the world population still live in countries with inadequate or non-existent access to medicines containing narcotic drugs

Ensuring that internationally controlled substances are available for medical and scientific purposes in all parts of the world is one of the fundamental objectives of the international drug control system. Such substances include opium and its derivatives, but also synthetic drugs such as methadone. This objective is also an obligation of the States parties to the international drug control conventions and must be at the heart of a balanced approach to the world drug problem.

Discrepancies in the availability of narcotic drugs for licit purposes

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has previously signalled that there are major discrepancies in the availability of narcotic drugs in various countries. The INCB Report for 2014 shows that despite increased consumption in some countries, there are still approximately 5.5 billion people who have limited or no access to medicines containing narcotic drugs such as codeine or morphine. This means that around three quarters of the world's population do not have access to proper pain relief treatment.

What is more, around 92 per cent of morphine used worldwide is consumed by only 17 per cent of the world population, primarily located in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Low demand for opioid analgesics for pain relief in many countries is not the result of a shortage of licitly produced raw material (mainly poppy straw), but of a wide range of other complex factors. These include poor regulatory regimes, lack of training and awareness among medical practitioners, cultural attitudes with respect to the treatment of pain, economic factors, and sourcing and distribution challenges.

Increasing illicit demand due to drug dependence

Not only are the adoption of measures for the reduction of demand for illicit drugs and the provision of treatment for drug abuse essential elements of a balanced approach, they are also obligations under the international drug control treaties.

Drug dependence is constantly fuelling the illicit demand for drugs. To address it, a common understanding is required that drug dependence is a multi-factorial health disorder. The INCB Report stresses that a comprehensive approach to the demand aspect of the drug problem requires implementing a variety of measures, including prevention, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The effective implementation of these measures requires cooperation



between various stakeholders, such as educational institutions, health-care, social-care, justice, enforcement and employment agencies, faith-based institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.

These measures should be reflected in national legislation and programmes addressing demand for illicit drug supplies.

Progress in reducing supply also requires developing effective responses to new challenges such as the rapid proliferation of new psychoactive substances, emerging threats from shifting drug trafficking routes, new drug trafficking trends and the use of new communication technologies in drug-related organized crime.

Socioeconomic aspects – drivers of illicit drug abuse

Poverty, food insecurity, economic inequality, social exclusion, deprivation, displacement, a shortage of educational and recreational facilities and employment prospects, poor parental engagement and guidance during early childhood, and exposure to violence and abuse are some of the socioeconomic factors that have an impact on both the supply and demand sides of the drug problem. These elements are important drivers of the illicit drug phenomenon which need to be taken into consideration when addressing the world drug problem within a comprehensive, integrated and balanced approach.

What should Governments do to implement a balanced approach?

Governments should ensure that reducing illicit demand is one of the first priorities of their drug control policies and that all aspects of the drug problem are addressed in a balanced and comprehensive manner. The Board recommends that Member States provide political support and appropriate resources to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation and that they also address national and local specificities of the drug problem.

Governments should respect all relevant human rights norms in designing drug-related strategies and policies. They should fully implement the international legal framework to protect children from drug-related activities and to ensure that national and international drug control strategies and policies take into consideration the principle of the best interests of the child.

The International Narcotics Control Board underscores that it is ready to support Governments in their efforts to address the drug problem and stresses the importance of working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.