


# Regulation of Illegal drugs

On behalf of over 200 frontline  
Youth Workers

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- ▶ Since the early 1980's the State has been waging war on the illegal drug trade
  - ▶ Despite the seizure of enormous quantities of drugs, the imprisonment of thousands of young men and the breaking up of a number of high-profile gangs. **Drugs are more widely available in Ireland than ever before.**
  - ▶ Drugs use is at its highest level ever and Cocaine use in Ireland is one of the highest per head of population in the world.
  - ▶ **Our present approach is clearly not working!**

- ▶ Such is the level of profit to be made through the sale of illegal drugs that as soon as one gang is broken up that they are immediately replaced by a new group, with no interruption of supply.
- ▶ Drug gangs have no conscience when it comes to selling their products to children under 18 and likewise have no concerns regarding the toxicity of their product.
- ▶ They continue to recruit young people (often as young as 12) into their operations through a process of money, fear, debt and intimidation.
- ▶ They continue to intimidate individuals, families and communities with often very public displays of violence. Their brutal methods of drug debt collection force families to pay exorbitant sums.

- ▶ As frontline Youth Workers, many of us with over 25 years of experience, we are fully aware of the terrible harm that drugs do to individuals, families and communities.
- ▶ However, we also recognise the additional harm that present Government policies create.
- ▶ Including Families and Communities living in fear and intimidation. Children growing up in Communities where from a very young age they know the names and roles of local drug gang leaders and witness drug dealing every day.
- ▶ Considerable numbers of young people imprisoned and facing a life of difficulties as a result of their drug convictions.


# Recommendation

- ▶ We are calling for a progressive change to the way we manage the illegal drug problem.
- ▶ We believe a move towards Decriminalisation is an important first step, however, people will still need to buy their drugs from drug gangs, and it will do nothing to impact the illegal drugs trade, enable quality control or protect vulnerable young people from being groomed into the illegal drugs trade.
- ▶ We are calling on the Citizens Assembly to go further and **Regulate** the sale of the main illegal drugs through responsible outlets, (e.g. new State outlets or Pharmacy chains).
  
- ▶ **We believe that this:**
  - ▶ 1. Will reduce access to drugs for young people under 18.
  - ▶ 2. Remove the profits from drug gangs
  - ▶ 3. Reduce the numbers of young people being criminalised.
  - ▶ 4. Regulate the strength and toxicity of drugs being used.

- ▶ Many people who presently use illegal drugs do not want to engage with criminal gangs, however, due to the present Government policies we leave them no choice.
- ▶ We recognise that this proposed progressive move will result in some adults beginning to use drugs, who may for a range of reasons previously chose not to do so. However, we also believe that the vast majority of our population who wish to use drugs are already doing so.
- ▶ Many young people already choose not to smoke, though cigarettes are readily available (at least 75% of 16-year-olds). Likewise, many young people also choose not to drink alcohol again despite easy accessibility (up to 50% of 16 year olds). We are confident that many young people will make healthy lifestyle choices regarding drugs.

# More recommendations

- ▶ We are proposing the implementation of a National Drug Strategy that prioritises a health led approach over a criminal justice approach to drug use.
- ▶ Investment in drug treatment and community development.
- ▶ We are also proposing that considerable investment is made in Public Health Campaigns on both Social Media and Mainstream Media, highlighting the dangers of drug use. We have seen the success of anti-smoking campaigns in the past.
- ▶ We advocate for the “Icelandic model”, which has seen considerable success in reducing teenage alcohol use in that country through considerable investment in early years and young people's social and recreation.
- ▶ We advocate for significant improvement in our ‘spent convictions’ legislation to give thousands of young men a reasonable opportunity to build a positive lifestyle and contribute to their community.

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- ▶ **If we do not demand a progressive policy change nothing will change on the ground.**
  - ▶ **We will be back here in another 25 years debating the same issues.**
  - ▶ **Be brave, demand change!**