



UNHRC

CET MUN 2025



AGENDA

Recommendations to reform United Nations Drug Policy to promote Rehabilitation over Punishment

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Respected Diplomats,

The Executive Board of the **UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL** extends a warm welcome to all of you and congratulates you on being part of **CET MUN 2025**.

This Introductory guide would be as abstract as possible, and would just give you a basic perspective on what you can expect from the committee and areas wherein your research should be focused at this given point of time. In this Committee, your presence of mind and analytical aptitude is something which we the executive board would be looking forward to. That being said, kindly do not limit your research to the areas highlighted further but ensure that you logically deduce and push your research to areas associated with the issues mentioned. Kindly note, we are not looking for existing solutions or statements that would be a copy/paste of what the leader you are representing have already stated; instead, we seek an out of the box solution from you, while knowing and understanding your impending political and ideological limitations.

The objective of this background guide is to provide you with a 'background' of the issue at hand and therefore it might seem to some as not being comprehensive enough. If you feel that the Guide does not cover all the issues and it could have been compiled in a better way by giving more information or links or better arguments 'for' and 'against', we think that would be the appropriate time to pat our backs for we successfully managed to compile a 'Background Guide' and not a 'Study Guide' which most of the Executive Board members fail to differentiate. We feel that 'study guides' are detrimental to the individual growth of the delegate since they overlook a very important part of this activity, which is Research. We are sure however that this background guide gives you a perfect launching pad to start with your research.

We look forward to a very successful committee with a proper learning experience for the delegates, especially the ones with lesser experience. Feel free to contact and clarify doubts in the course of research.

**Warm Regards,
Executive Board**



BACKGROUND GUIDE FOR UNHRC'25

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VALID SOURCES

Please take into serious consideration the following points regarding the type of documents that you might want to produce in the committee so as to substantiate your stance:

Valid and Binding:

1. All reports published by the United Nations and its agencies.
2. Reports by Governments and its agencies. (With respect to their country only.)

Valid but not binding, in the order of precedence:

1. Reuters
2. Al Jazeera
3. Amnesty International
4. Human Rights Watch
5. Reporters without borders

Not Valid but can be used for reference purposes:

1. Any report published by a recognized news agency or NGO.

Not accepted under any condition:

1. Wikipedia
2. WikiLeaks
3. Blog Articles



COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

2.1 WHAT IS UNHRC?

The Human Rights Council is one of the major intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations that focuses on human rights. It was created by the General Assembly in 2006 and set up to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights all over the world.

The Council has 47 Member States and offers a multilateral forum for addressing gross and persistent human rights abuses and country situations. It addresses human rights emergencies and suggests ways to better implement human rights on the ground.

The Council receives substantive, technical, and secretariat support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Human Rights Council succeeds the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The Human Rights Council between 2006 and 2022 in numbers:

- 51 Regular Sessions
- 35 Special Sessions
- 8 Urgent Debates
- 1,372 Resolutions adopted
- 59 Special Procedures mandates
- 37 Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-finding missions
- 123 out of 193 UN Member States have sat on the Council

WHAT EXACTLY DOES THE UNHRC DO?

- Adopts resolutions or decisions during regular sessions, expressing the will of the international community on any given human rights issues or situations. Adoption of a resolution sends a very strong political signal that can spur governments into taking action to remedy those situations;
- Conducts crisis meetings known as special sessions to discuss pressing human rights situations, of which 36 have so far taken place;
- Reviews the human rights records of all United Nations Member States through the Universal Periodic Review;
- Appoints the Special Procedures, independent human rights experts who serve as the eyes and ears of the Council by monitoring situations in specific countries or by looking at specific themes; and
- Authorizes commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, which produce hard-hitting evidence on war crimes and crimes against humanity.

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

2.3 HOW ARE UNHRC MEMBERS ELECTED?

The Human Rights Council is composed of 47 Member States elected directly and individually by a majority of the 193 states of the UN General Assembly. Elections are held annually. The seats are distributed equitably among the five UN regional groups, with one-third of its members being renewed each year. Each member of the council serves a three-year term. Membership is limited to two consecutive terms. Rotating membership of the Council reflects the diversity of the UN and lends it legitimacy when speaking out against other violations of human rights in every country. Members commit to respect human rights and must cooperate fully with the Council. The General Assembly may decide to suspend a membership in cases of gross and systematic violations of human rights.

2.4 WHAT DOES THE COUNCIL COMPRIZE OF?

The Human Rights Council is composed of various mechanisms and bodies, as outlined in the Council's 'Institution-building package' (Resolution 5/1) of 2007. These comprise:

- The Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a State-led mechanism that regularly reviews the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States.
- The Special Procedures are individuals or groups, not in the UN payroll, who advocate on themes like education, health, free speech, and human trafficking, as well as on country situations, including Ukraine, DPRK, Eritrea, and Iran, among others.
- This "think tank" Advisory Committee provides the Council with specialized expertise and advice on any thematic human rights issues it deems appropriate.
- The Complaint Procedure enables individuals and entities to have human rights abuses brought before the Human Rights Council's attention.



INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

"Recommendations to reform United Nations Drug Policy to promote Rehabilitation over Punishment"

The international drug policy environment has for many years been dominated by a repressive model in which the use and possession of drugs are criminalized. This approach, based on decades of international treaties, has resulted in mass incarceration, social stigmatization, and reduced access to health care for drug users. Despite its aim to stop drug abuse and drug trafficking, the punishment-first approach has frequently not succeeded in treating the underlying causes of addiction or lowering drug-related harm. Rather, it has contributed to overcrowded prisons, stigmatized communities, and continuing cycles of use. Over the past several years, mounting evidence and advocacy have pushed for a move towards rehabilitation-based policies. Rehabilitation treats drug use as a public health problem, not a criminal one. It prioritizes medical treatment, psychological counseling, and social reintegration. Nations such as Portugal, which decriminalized possession of drugs and invested heavily in treatment facilities, have experienced remarkable positive developments in public health measures, such as decreased overdose death rates and rates of HIV transmission.

The United Nations, through its multilateral conventions and agencies, is at the center of establishing global drug policy. A shift in its approach to emphasize rehabilitation from punishment could have a revolutionary effect on the way member states respond to issues of drugs. This change would bring it in line with human rights, encourage public health, and decrease the social and economic burden of repressive drug laws. This agenda attempts to discuss how the UN can drive this reform by revising its frameworks, motivating member states to use evidence-based practices, and embedding human rights in drug policy. It also considers the impact of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on promoting humane treatment of drug users and alternatives to imprisonment.

WHAT IS UN DRUG POLICY

The United Nations Drug Policy refers to the overall description of the international legal system and institutional arrangements that determine the way nations address drug problems. It mainly draws on three major treaties:

- **The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)** – This convention seeks to restrict the use of narcotics drugs to medical and scientific applications and puts controls on their cultivation, manufacture, and delivery.
- **The Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)** – This extends control to synthesized drugs and psychotropic substances, once again limiting their utilization to medical and scientific purposes.
- **The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)** – This convention is aimed at anti-trafficking against drug trafficking and has provisions for the criminalization of drug-related crimes.

All these treaties constitute the core of the international system for drug control. They are supervised by institutions such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). These agencies monitor conformity, offer technical assistance, and assist member states in the application of drug policy. Traditionally, the UN drug policy has prioritized supply reduction and criminal enforcement, to the detriment of health-oriented responses in many cases. The 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem was a turning point. The UNGASS outcome document urged member states to pursue alternatives to conviction or punishment, particularly for lower-level drug offenses. In 2018, the UN System Chief Executives Board endorsed a Common Position on Drug Policy, urging to be reformed laws that endanger the health and human rights of drug users. The position advocates for a balanced policy involving prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and social reintegration. Despite these developments, many countries still rely heavily on punitive measures. The challenge lies in translating UN principles into national laws and practices. Reforming the UN Drug Policy to prioritize rehabilitation would require clearer guidelines, stronger advocacy, and more robust support for member states willing to adopt progressive models.

REHABILITATION vs PUNISHMENT

The rehabilitation-punishment debate in drug policy is not only philosophical—it has tangible consequences for people, for communities, and for public health systems. Here's how the two approaches break down:

REHABILITATION:

Rehabilitation addresses drug use as a health problem. Medical treatment, psychological counseling, social guidance, and vocational rehabilitation are used. The aim is to enable patients to recover from addiction and rejoin society. Rehabilitation programs are either voluntary or ordered by the courts and may consist of detoxification, therapy, and aftercare. Portugal and other countries have successfully employed this model. Portugal, in 2001, decriminalized the possession of all illicit drugs for personal use and channeled resources to treatment and harm reduction. The country subsequently experienced a sharp decline in overdose mortality, HIV infections, and crime related to drugs. Rehabilitation is also backed by organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNODC, which focus on evidence-based care and treatment. Rehabilitation also fits within human rights norms and encourages long-term recovery.

PUNISHMENT:

Punishment treats drug use as a crime. It includes arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and fines. The aim is to discourage drug use through legal penalties. Nevertheless, this method results in mass incarceration, particularly among marginalized communities, and does not do much to tackle the basis of addiction. In the United States, the "War on Drugs" produced aggressive sentencing laws and a surge in prison populations. Large numbers of people with drug use disorders were incarcerated without access to treatment, and high rates of relapse and recidivism occurred. Punitive policies can also be against human rights if they include forced detention, denial of medical care, or discrimination. They fuel social stigma and make things more difficult for people to get help.



ROLE OF UNHRC

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is key to the promotion of drug policies that are respectful and protective of human rights. It has continually emphasized how punitive drug laws harm already vulnerable groups and promoted drug policies based on health. In its reports and resolutions, the UNHRC has stressed that drug users must not be criminalized for their illnesses.

Rather, they must be offered voluntary, available, and evidence-based care. The Council has asked member states to:

- Abolish compulsory drug detention centers, which commonly infringe on rights to liberty and health.
- Guarantee access to harm reduction interventions, including needle exchange programs and opioid substitution therapy.
- Defend the rights of women, youths, and minorities, who are most impacted by punitive drug policies.

A notable action was the Joint Statement on Compulsory Drug Detention and Rehabilitation Centers (2012, revised in 2020), which was signed by several UN agencies. They denounced the practice of forced treatment and demanded that these centers "be closed immediately." The UNHRC also advocates for the inclusion of drug policy within the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goals 3 (health), Goal 16 (justice), and Goal 10 (inequality). Through advocating for rehabilitation, the Council wishes to diminish harm, enhance dignity, and advance inclusive development. Working with UNODC and WHO, the UNHRC has assisted in the development of guidelines for alternatives to conviction or punishment. These would involve diversion programs, community-based treatment, and restorative justice models. The advocacy by the Council has resulted in policy reforms in a number of countries. For instance, Kenya and Nigeria have launched pilot programs providing treatment instead of imprisonment for petty drug crimes. These programs are underpinned by UNODC's Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) framework. Finally, the UNHRC has a mandate to make sure that drug policies are not only effective but also ethical and based on human rights. Its efforts are needed in order to change the narrative worldwide from punishment to care.



QARMA

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. What defines “rehabilitation” and what specific methods or programs are encompassed under this term?
2. What are the criteria for determining offenses or situations where rehabilitation should be prioritized over punitive measures?
3. What concrete measures should member states adopt to transition from punitive approaches to rehabilitation-focused policies?
4. How will equal access to rehabilitation services across different countries and communities be ensured, especially in low-resource settings?
5. What bodies or mechanisms will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of these reforms and ensuring compliance?
6. How will the effectiveness of rehabilitation-centered strategies be measured and reported at the national and international level?
7. What is the guarantee that individuals undergoing rehabilitation are protected from discrimination, abuse, or violations of their human rights?
8. What provisions are included to address the needs of vulnerable populations, such as minors, women, and marginalized communities, within rehabilitation programs?
9. What role should international organizations, including the UNODC and WHO, play in supporting and overseeing the reform process?
10. How can best practices and successful models from different countries be shared and adapted globally?

