



WOMEN AND DRUGS:

Gender equality at the heart of drug policies

The dynamics generated by drugs in society, in terms of consumption, trafficking and criminal justice, produce specific vulnerabilities in women. Drug policies, which have traditionally suffered from a gender bias, have not systematically addressed the barriers to access that women experience in prevention services and comprehensive care, or the structural conditions that limit the possibilities of economic development. Furthermore, women are more affected by the limited coverage and/or lack of coordination of care systems in the most vulnerable territories. In these contexts, poor, migrant or sexually diverse women suffer processes of stigmatisation and multiple discrimination. As regards trafficking, the perverse link

between human and drug trafficking, as well as sentences for minor micro-trafficking crimes that lack proportionality, are phenomena that particularly affect women. All of these vulnerabilities compromise women's ability to exercise their most basic rights in a physically, psychologically and economically independent way.

The third phase of COPOLAD incorporates a comprehensive and inter-sectional gender approach, with a work proposal that aims to strengthen various public policy instruments to improve the situation of women who are affected - in various dimensions - by the problem of drugs. A dual approach is followed for the inclusion of the gender perspective. Positive actions, understood as specific measures to

guarantee and balance the participation of women in all areas of society, will intersect with gender mainstreaming throughout the Programme.

4 implementing PARTNERS:
FIIAPP (International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies)
IILA (Italian Latin American Institute)
GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, the main German development agency)
EUDA (European Union Drugs Agency)



WHAT STRATEGY DO WE FOLLOW

DUAL APPROACH (MAINSTREAMING AND POSITIVE ACTIONS)

- ▶ Mainstreaming the gender approach in all thematic lines of the programme:
 - Concerted effort to strengthen the physical and economic autonomy of women.
- Incidence on discrimination, barriers to access, vulnerabilities and stigmatisation phenomena suffered by women in the framework of drug policies, from the point of view of supply and demand.
- Adoption of the differential and inter-sectional approach.
- ▶ Positive actions in training and exchange activities.

REGIONAL AND MULTI-COUNTRY STRATEGY

- ▶ Support for the development of regional tools (standards, protocols, guides and exchange of good practices).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- ▶ Bilateral technical assistance to countries to accompany specific mainstreaming processes.



IN WHICH AREAS DO WE WORK



RAISING VISIBILITY OF THE GENDER DIMENSION WITHIN THE DRUG PROBLEM

At the **REGIONAL** level, the programme has contributed to preparing reports and methodological guides:

- ▶ In 2022, we updated "Women and Drug Policies: Situation in LAC, progress and priorities", a report which laid the foundations for mainstreaming gender within the thematic lines of the programme:

- The report was presented at the 2022 High Level Meeting of the CELAC-EU Drug Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism (Asunción, June 2022), which served to make the gender dimension visible at the bi-regional level.

- ▶ We published a Methodological Guide to incorporating the gender approach into drug research systems, which provides:



- Conceptual definitions, notes on the pertinence of mainstreaming, and a section on relevant regulations.
- Guidelines for incorporating the gender perspective in the phases of conceptualisation, design, sampling and data collection,

analysis and dissemination of results.

- Possible new lines of research on drugs with a gender perspective, suggesting relevant problems and methodological approach strategies.



ALIGNMENT with GLOBAL POLICIES on gender equality

General Assembly resolution S-30-1 on drugs - UNGASS, 2016
"Our Joint Commitment to Effectively Addressing and Countering the World Drug Problem"

- ▶ Operational recommendations on cross-cutting issues: drugs and human rights, youth, children, women and communities:

g) Mainstream a gender perspective into and ensure the involvement of women in all stages of the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of drug policies and programmes, develop and disseminate gender-sensitive and age-appropriate measures that take into account the specific needs and circumstances faced by women and girls with regard to the world drug problem [...]

At the **NATIONAL** level, COPOLAD III has contributed to promoting the **inclusion of the gender approach in eight National Drug Observatories (NDOs)** in the LAC region, through research protocols, improvement of questionnaires and review of gender categories for data registration and analysis:

In a disaggregated form, valuable results are being generated in several countries:

- ▶ **ARGENTINA:** Progress has been made in incorporating the gender approach in a study on treatment of addiction, particularly in users of the federal network of Casas Comunitarias Convivenciales (special housing for drug users). The study analyses the barriers to access and the reconciliation of treatment with childcare responsibilities for women and members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- ▶ **CHILE:** A process of conceptual unification of generic sex categories is being carried out for the data registration sources of the National Service for the Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug Use (SENDA). In addition, the gender approach was included in a study to characterise the population that consumes synthetic drugs in the metropolitan region of Santiago.
- ▶ **COSTA RICA:** Support was given to the design of a study on the

prevalence of drug use in women deprived of liberty, with a gender perspective.

- ▶ **ECUADOR:** The quick survey of drug use among university students was reviewed with a gender focus, as regards both the questionnaire and the calendar and times.
- ▶ **JAMAICA** It has been agreed with the National Council on Drug Abuse to incorporate gender into the methodological design of two studies on drug consumption in two groups: a) pregnant adolescents; and b) persons with disabilities.
- ▶ **MEXICO:** The Mexican Observatory of Mental Health and Drug Use was supported by means of a review with a gender perspective of the National Mental Health and Addictions Survey and the field survey form, as well as the data analysis and report preparation system.
- ▶ **SURINAME:** Technical assistance was provided to the National Anti-Drug Council to improve a questionnaire on drug use for the LGBTQ+ population with a gender perspective.
- ▶ **VENEZUELA:** The methodological design of a study of patients admitted to the emergency room due to drug use is being reviewed with a gender perspective.



STRENGTHENING PHYSICAL AUTONOMY

- ▶ **Incidence on four critical vulnerabilities that compromise the physical autonomy of women:**

1. Barriers to access to care and harm reduction services.

- ▶ At the **REGIONAL** level experiences have been shared (public programmes and civil society initiatives) on the incorporation of the gender approach in prevention and harm reduction services:

- The shared public experiences correspond to specific treatment programmes for women (Chile), prevention in the field of tobacco, women and psychotropic drugs (Extremadura Regional Government, Spain), the “Tek it to Dem” programme (Jamaica), access to specialised health services (Portugal), and the El Jagüel reference centre that provides addiction treatment (Uruguay).
- From civil society, the experience of safe shelter environments for women who use drugs and suffer violence (Metzineres, Spain) was shared, as were those of the community space



The program incorporates a comprehensive and intersectional gender approach, with a work proposal that seeks to strengthen the various public policy instruments to improve the situation of women affected by the drug phenomenon.

for drug users and families Encare, Uruguay, and the Outreach harm reduction programme run by Àmbit Previsió, Barcelona.

- ▶ Furthermore, technical skills in mainstreaming gender were reinforced among the technical staff of public care institutions and national drug agencies. Training modules were developed on changes in narratives and intervention paradigms, participatory management and co-management, dignity and transversality, strengthening of autonomy, and inter-sectoral alliances, among others.

During 2023 COPOLAD III, together

- ▶ with the countries of the region, has worked on the analysis of stigma as a social phenomenon that affects women who use drugs. In 2024, a Policy Paper on “women, drugs and stigmatisation” will be prepared that will contribute to positioning this problem on the regional agenda and facilitate its being tackled at a national level.

At the **NATIONAL** level, COPOLAD III has promoted two **social innovation laboratories** with a gender perspective aimed at improving access and social inclusion of prevention and harm reduction services:

- ▶ **CHILE:** The programme promotes a social innovation laboratory in the field of prevention of drug use by minors in the care of the State (children, adolescents and young people at risk). A pilot project has been identified in a municipal school, which will function as a place of inter-institutional co-ordination and intergenerational meeting for the community. The experimental portfolio includes a community harm reduction mechanism for families who consume drugs with a gender focus.

- ▶ **COLOMBIA:** We collaborate with the MJD to design and launch two social innovation laboratories to reduce the vulnerability factors of young people linked to micro-trafficking and problematic use of drugs and psychoactive substances in Santander de Quilichao and the urban area of Cali. The laboratory’s experimentation portfolio includes gastronomic micro-enterprises managed by women.

Additionally, other countries are being supported to **improve access to care systems** (for women and/or the LGBTIQ+ population). For example:

- ▶ **MEXICO:** The National Commission on Mental Health and Addic-

tions (CONASAMA) is assisted in the development of a Guide to addressing consumption in sexually diverse populations, and an associated toolbox for social and health care centres.

At the **BI-REGIONAL** level, the EUDA is adapting its “Guide to Health and Social Responses to Drug Problems” (2017) to the LAC context. In coordination with partner countries, priority has been given, among others, to the “thematic mini-guide on health responses and gender to be adapted to the reality of the region.

2. Adverse effects of limited coverage and/or lack of coordination of care systems in vulnerable territories and communities

At the **REGIONAL** level, the programme has generated a **training and exchange space**:

- ▶ Regulated training has been carried out on the ECO2 Community Treatment model, which builds on the central role of women in community intervention strategies, as well as their role in articulating formal and informal networks in vulnerable territories.



ALIGNED with REGIONAL POLICIES on gender equality

▶ Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs 2021-2025, OAS/CICAD.

- Pillar 1 on institutional strengthening, Objective 2: “Formulate, implement, evaluate, and update comprehensive national drug policies and/or strategies that promote balanced, multidisciplinary, and evidence-based approaches (...) and take into account gender, age, community, cultural context, and socially inclusive development.”

▶ EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025, European Council.

- Strategic priority 6: “Ensure access to and strengthen treatment and care services” (with a gender perspective)
- Strategic priority 9: “Enhancing the role of the EU as a global broker for a people-centred and human rights-oriented drug policy.

▶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025”

▶ Gender Action Plan III: towards gender equality (GAP III)

- ▶ A Guide to Good Practices for community intervention, linked to drugs and vulnerable territories in LAC and the EU has been prepared. The guide offers a repository of territorialisation indicators, including several that are gender-sensitive.

At the **NATIONAL** level, several countries are making explicit efforts to **incorporate the gender approach in territorialisation projects**. As an example:

- ▶ COLOMBIA: Support for the development of the Strategic Vulnerabilities Reduction Plan and the community action policy of Colombia.
- ▶ DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: The Bani Women's Prison is supported in the initial phase of implementation of the Wings of Transformation Programme aimed at women in prison.
- ▶ URUGUAY: The National Drug Board has identified a pilot scheme in the day care centre for women and homeless people of the community of Las Piedras (Canelones), within the framework of the *La Otra Esquina* ("The Other Corner") programme.

3. Link between human and drug trafficking

At the **REGIONAL** level, the programme supported the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors (AIAMP) in incorporating the gender perspective into the comprehensive approach to investigations of drug trafficking with women victims of human trafficking. The three thematic networks of the AIAMP involved in the problem, those specialising in the fight against drugs (RFAI), gender problems (REG) and human trafficking (REDTRAM) worked jointly for the first time:

- ▶ The programme carried out a diagnosis of the problem of discrimination suffered by vulnerable women involved in drug trafficking who are conditioned by or subjected to human trafficking circuits.

- ▶ As a result, an inter-network technical working group has been created, in charge of preparing the Regional Guidelines to incorporating the gender approach in the link between human trafficking and drug trafficking, with technical support from COPOLAD III).

- ▶ The roadmap includes pilot projects in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, countries in which training of civil servants in the prosecutors' offices is planned.

4. Adverse impact of convictions for minor micro-trafficking crimes and the lack of proportionality of sentences

At the **REGIONAL** level, the programme supports the Conference of Ministers of Justice of Ibero-America (COMJIB) and the Inter-American Association of Public Defenders (AIDEF) in the creation of instruments and standards of alternatives to imprisonment and proportionality, in line with the human rights and gender approach:

- ▶ COMJIB: Technical support for the design and implementation of a "Pact for the humanisation of criminal and prison policy in Ibero-America", which aims to optimise the efforts of LAC countries to move towards the configuration of more humane and inclusive justice systems, particularly for women. This includes the development of two instruments:
 - Diagnosis of the legal framework to identify the main regional problems in criminal justice and prison policy relating to micro-drug trafficking crimes, taking several countries as a reference (Colombia, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Argentina)
 - Ibero-American Minimum Standards for the development of criminal justice policies consistent with the principles of proportionality and alternative

penal approaches in relation to drug crimes.

- ▶ AIDEF: It is planned to provide technical assistance for the construction of a Regional Specialised Defence Protocol for Women in conflict with the law due to the commission of drug crimes, with a focus on human rights, gender, public health and sustainable development.

At the **NATIONAL** level, COPOLAD III provides technical support to several countries in the region, in accordance with national requests. Three of these technical assistance projects relate to protocols aimed at protecting women:

- ▶ COSTA RICA: Support for the development of the Restorative Justice Programme within the framework of the National Drug Strategy. Specifically, technical assistance is provided to the Judiciary of Costa Rica, the Costa Rican Drug Institute (ICD) and the Institute on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (IAFA) to develop a "Protocol for Comprehensive Attention to Women in Conflict with the Criminal Law" (under Article 77-bis of Law 8204). The added value of the protocol lies in addressing the specific vulnerabilities that women face from with an approach based on comprehensive response and restorative justice.
- ▶ PARAGUAY: Support to the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (SENDA) and the Ministry of Public Defence (MDP) in the design of criminal defence strategies with a gender focus. In particular, a "Defence Protocol for Women in conflict with the law due to the commission of drug crimes" is being developed, linked to the regional standards that are being developed in AIDEF. It is expected to conclude with training for public criminal defenders in the country and with a space for regional exchange of lessons learnt between several countries.



STRENGTHENING OF ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

► Incidence on two critical vulnerabilities that compromise the economic autonomy of women:

1. Bias of social inclusion programmes towards traditional gender roles

At the **REGIONAL** level, the programme has contributed to the exchange of experiences, through several actions:

- A [Guide to the Social Inclusion of people who use drugs](#), was prepared. It includes a conceptual chapter on gender perspective, differential approach to rights and inter-sectionality. The Guide incorporates the gender approach in the tools offered for diagnosis, the roadmap, the mapping of agents and in the set of indicators.
- [Experiences were exchanged](#) on the incorporation of the gender perspective in social inclusion programmes. Such is the case for example of the "Building Opportunities" programme in Costa Rica, which has created *Unlock*, the first solidarity-based social economy initiative of the country's prison system.

2. Barriers to access to opportunities for Comprehensive and Sustainable Alternative Development

From a **REGIONAL** perspective the following progress has been achieved:

- In March 2023, GIZ launched a [digital training](#) programme on the gender approach in CSAD projects. The thematic contents include: gender theories, analysis of the role of women in areas where plants are grown for drug production and in CSAD value chains, as well as mainstreaming tools.
- Furthermore, a practical guide entitled "[Addressing Gender in Alternative Development Projects](#)", was prepared and has proven to be a pioneering work at world level. The guide includes several practical mainstreaming tools: i) steps to prepare baseline studies and value chain analysis with a gender perspective; ii) guiding questions and guidelines to institutionalise the gender approach.
- Additionally, [widespread dissemination](#) of the awareness-raising strategy in this area was promoted: The Guide was presented in international forums such as the CICAD meeting in Lima of the expert group on AD (October 2023), and in the parallel event to the intermediate session in Vienna of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

to commemorate 10 years of the Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (October 2023).

At the **NATIONAL** level, gender training has given rise to different appropriation processes in the various countries. In this context, Peru demonstrated substantial capacity for absorbing training:

- PERU: The National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (DEVIDA) opened the GIZ online training to the entire institution, achieving the [training of 50 civil servants](#) from various line directorates, decentralised offices and administrative units (about 12% of the organisation's staff). This training complemented the internal awareness-raising work of DEVIDA's own Gender Committee, and was very well received due to its innovative nature (both in terms of content and of the module-based self-learning format). As a result of Peru's participation in the Regional Forum in Mexico, the management of the institution decided to adopt the Practical Gender Guide as a [reference tool in the processes of updating the PIRDAIS \(CSAD Budget Programme\) and reviewing the National Anti-Drug Policy](#). In this regard, the PIRDAIS update (December 2023) incorporates gender elements at the level of priorities, diagnosis and planning of community training activities.



PUBLICATIONS

[Practical Guide: Addressing Gender in Alternative Development Projects.](#)

[Guidelines for integrating the gender perspective in the information systems of the National Drug Observatories](#)

[Report on women and drugs](#)



VIDEOS

[Interview with Karen Louise Vilanova, Brazilian judge on race, drugs and justice](#)

[Gender analysis of value chains in CSAD projects](#)

[The importance of gender roles in Alternative Development \(CSAD\) projects](#)

[Alternatives to incarceration for minor drug offences. Erenia's story.](#)

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Collaborating partners:

