



## Questions for European Election candidates

- If you are elected, how will you use your position in Europe to highlight the importance of addressing the drugs issue?
- If you are elected, will you lobby the Irish government to meet their commitments under the EU Action Plan on Drugs?
- If you are elected, will you support the position that International Drugs Policy should focus on drug use as a health issue and not as a criminal issue?

### Background to EU and International Drugs Policy

#### EU Policy on Drugs

In June 2013 the EU adopted the new Action Plan on Drugs (2013-2016) that sets out 54 concrete and evidence-based actions in the areas of drug demand reduction, drug supply reduction, coordination, international cooperation, information, research, monitoring and evaluation. This is the first Action Plan implementing the recently adopted EU Drugs Strategy for 2013-2020, which aims to contribute to a reduction in drug demand and drug supply within the EU. It also aims to reduce the health and social risks and harms caused by drugs through a strategic approach that supports and complements national policies, that provides a framework for coordinated and joint actions and that forms the basis and political framework for EU external cooperation in this field.

## **The following are the main elements of the Action Plan:**

**Demand reduction:** actions to tackle the challenge of misuse of prescribed and "over the counter" opioids and to improve health care measures available for drug users in prisons and after release are foreseen.

**Supply reduction:** measures to tackle the spread and use of new psychoactive substances, to promote alternatives to coercive sanctions for drug using offenders and to develop drug supply indicators are named.

**Coordination:** the on-going dialogue with civil society as well as with scientific community is encouraged.

**International cooperation:** the importance of dialogues on drugs with various partners is emphasised, alternative development is encouraged and EU commitment to contribute to the mid-term review process of the 2009 UN Political Declaration is mentioned.

**Information, research, monitoring and evaluation:** the research is promoted into all areas of drug phenomenon as well as evaluation of the quality of research that has been performed. Measures to improve capacity to detect the phenomenon on new psychoactive substances are also foreseen.

## **International Drugs Policy**

The United Nations (UN) is responsible for negotiating an international drug policy to which all member states sign up. There was a special meeting of the UN General Assembly (referred to as UNGASS) on drugs in 1998 at which member states agreed a **Political Declaration on Global Drug Control**. Ten years later, member states met in Vienna to discuss progress made and in 2009 a new **Political Declaration and Plan of Action** on International Cooperation to Counter the World Drug Problem was agreed.

The next UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) was due to be held in 2019. However in September 2012, the presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico called on the UN to host an international conference on drug policy reform and this led to the next global drug policy summit meeting being brought forward to 2016. This is now referred to as UNGASS 2016.

Those countries who are proposing reform of international drug policy want to see less focus on the “war on drugs” approach, as the evidence is showing that this approach doesn’t work, and more focus on development and health issues.

The preparations for UNGASS 2016 are already in progress with a **mid-term review** of the implementation of the 2009 Political Declaration taking place in Vienna in March 2014 – Minister Alex White represented the Irish government at the Vienna discussions.

The UNGASS on drugs comes at a time when there have been growing calls for drug policy reform across Latin America. For the first time, sitting presidents – such as Colombia’s Juan Manuel Santos and Guatemala’s Otto Pérez Molina – are questioning the current focus of international drug control and calling for debate on alternative approaches. One concrete result of such efforts was the May 2013 release of an **innovative report on drug policy** by the Organization of American States (OAS), as a tool for promoting regional and international debate.

At this year’s UN General Assembly meeting, the Presidents of Colombia and Guatemala were joined by the Presidents of Mexico and Costa Rica, who **called for developing more effective responses** to drug trafficking based on public health, respect for human rights and harm reduction. All four presidents united in calling for an open and wide-ranging debate leading up to the 2016 UNGASS.