

TO: The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

10 May 2021

Subject: Decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of psychoactive substances in the Republic of Lithuania

Honorable Members of the Seimas,

Signatories of this open letter welcome your consideration of the law on the decriminalization of possession of small amounts of psychoactive substances in the Republic of Lithuania and call on the Members of the Seimas to support the drug policy changes that are on the Seimas' agenda these days.

Every year thousands of people in Lithuania use drugs, but the repressive laws against people who use drugs introduced in 2017 have not yielded any positive results to the extent. From an expert point of view, there are many reasons why it is time to adopt rational approaches to drug policy and put health above punishment:

Based on regional and global experience, a country can save much more taxpayers money by reducing the number of people prosecuted for minor drug-related crimes (possession of small amounts with no intent to sell), as well minimizing the burden on the law enforcement and the justice system. Shifting priorities and investment towards health and social services for people who use drugs will allow law enforcement to focus on more serious crimes, including those associated with drug trafficking in large quantities, and ensure public safety.

Criminalization of people who use drugs puts people on the margins of the society and creates stigma and violation of the human rights of people who use drugs. This is why most people with drug use issues do not seek medical help, support or treatment. Decriminalization of small amounts of drugs will reduce stigma and discrimination and encourage people to trust the healthcare system. Decriminalization will also open new opportunities with the introduction of proven and effective public health interventions and harm reduction approaches (such as drug checking services), which are currently not possible due to laws that persecute anyone who possesses drugs (even if it's a harm reduction service provider). Prohibitive laws also create barriers to prescribing pain relievers and palliative medication. Decriminalization and alternatives to coercive sanctions should be adopted to reduce human rights violations of people who use drugs and improve their access to health and social services which would have positive public health impact.

We believe that the Members of the Lithuanian Seimas will make pragmatic and evidence-based decision on the decriminalization of possession of small amounts of psychoactive substances, thereby placing Lithuania on a par with countries that, thanks to a balanced drug policy, are changing the lives of their citizens for the better. The international community is calling the highest national legislative authority for the abolition of penalties for the possession of drugs in small amounts to ensure justice and protection of human rights for Lithuanian citizens.

With sincere support and hope the open letter is signed by:

Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, Lithuania