



# **Global developments in drug policy since 2016: shifts away from punitive approaches**

**Gloria Lai, Regional Director: Asia**

**AHRA Training Workshop (Online)**

**17 November 2025**

**[glai@idpc.net](mailto:glai@idpc.net)**

# Notable changes at global level since 2016

## 2016: UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION (UNGASS)



- Highest level of UN debate
- Agreed “Outcome Document” with specific chapters on:
  - Health
  - Human Rights
  - Development
- MS (and UN agencies and NGOs) spoke up for harm reduction, need for reform, decriminalisation, abolition of the death penalty etc



# Notable changes at global level since 2016

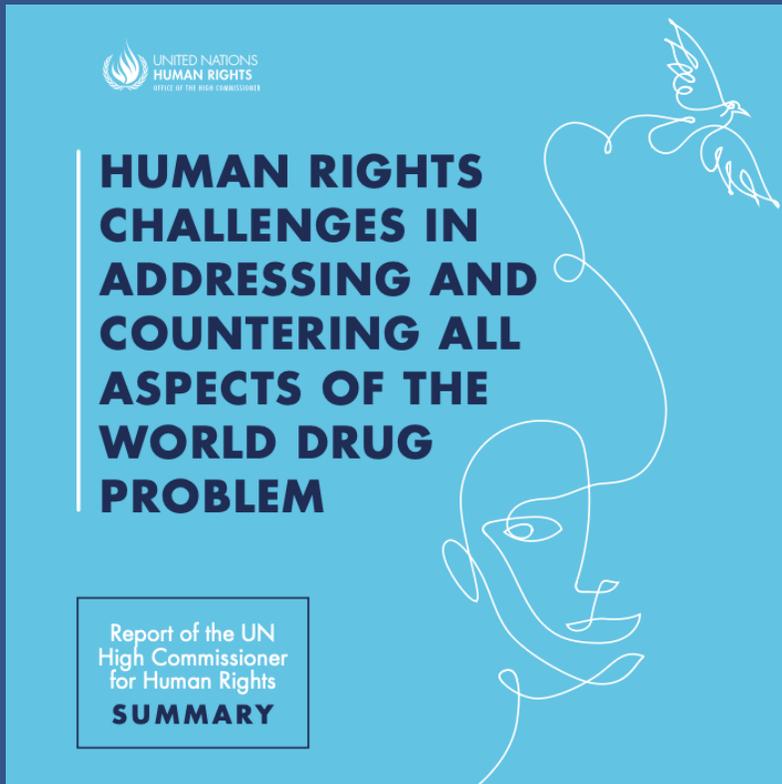
## 2020: CANNABIS 'RE-SCHEDULED'

- WHO ECDD performed “critical review”
- Recommended to take cannabis out of Schedule IV (1961)
- CND voted in favour
- Acknowledges “medical value” of cannabis
- (More than 500 million people now live in places that have or plan to have legally regulated markets)



# Notable changes at global level since 2016

## 2023: OHCHR FINDS WIDESPREAD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (A/HRC/54/53)



- Lack of harm reduction and treatment
- Lack of pain relief and essential medicines
- Prison overcrowding
- Use of the death penalty
- Militarisation of drug policy
- Disproportionate impacts on women, children and youth, people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples
- Environmental impacts

Recommendations: decriminalisation, harm reduction, proportionate criminal penalties, abolition of the death penalty, development policies for farmers of crops deemed illicit, addressing disproportionate impacts on women etc.

# Notable changes at global level since 2016

## 2024: CND VOTES ON HARM REDUCTION

- “Harm reduction” is political issue at CND
- US leadership in harm reduction at the CND in response to its opioid overdose crisis
- Coordinated effort of member states to support
- Russia called for a vote and lost
- **38 in favour**, only 2 against (Russia & China)



# Notable changes at global level since 2016

## VIENNA CONSENSUS 'FLIES OUT OF THE CND'!

After over three decades agreeing on everything, the intergovernmental body in charge of global drug policy cannot unanimously agree on anything. Calls for transformative change by Member States, UN agencies and civil society clashed with status quo and anti-rights powers.

Historic CND session concludes with flurry of votes that reveal global appetite for review and reform, despite marginal opposition led by the US.

### L.6 Strengthening the global drug control framework: a path to effective implementation

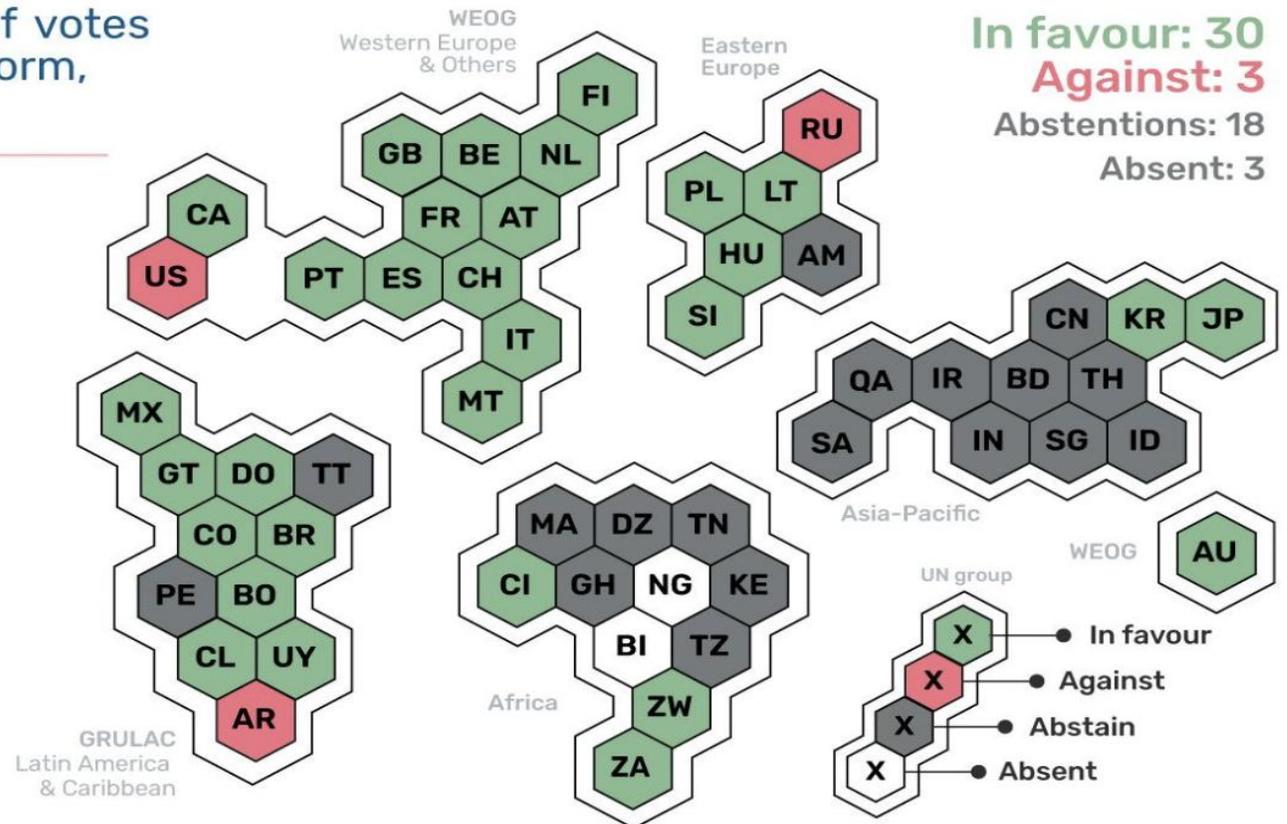
(L.6. Rev.1 –as amended by L.10)

Co-sponsored by: Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Côte D'Ivoire, Honduras, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

This ground-breaking resolution, led by Colombia, sets the basis for the first-ever independent review of global drug control.

It provides for the creation of a panel of 19 experts to hold consultations and propose recommendations to align drug policies with all international obligations, including human rights.

Despite difficult negotiations, a cross-regional alliance successfully challenged US dominance, showing growing international support for drug policy reform.



# Notable changes at global level since 2016

## L.2 (Rev.1) Promoting comprehensive, scientific evidence-based and multisectoral national systems of drug use prevention for children and adolescents

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Andorra, Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, Uruguay.



In favour: 46  
Against: 1  
Abstentions: 1  
Absent: 5

## L.3 (Rev.1) Promoting research on scientific evidence-based interventions for the treatment and care of stimulant use disorders

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Morocco, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom.



In favour: 49  
Against: 2  
Abstentions: 0  
Absent: 2

## L.4 (Rev.1) Complementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Armenia, Brazil, Colombia, China, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Peru, Thailand, United Kingdom.



In favour: 48  
Against: 2  
Abstentions: 1  
Absent: 2

## L.5 (Rev.1) Safety of officers in dismantling illicit synthetic drug laboratories, in particular those involving synthetic opioids

Co-sponsored by: European Union (on behalf of its Member States in CND: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), Albania, Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Ghana, Honduras, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Switzerland, United Kingdom.



In favour: 48  
Against: 2  
Abstentions: 2  
Absent: 2

## L.7 (Rev.1) Addressing the impacts of illicit drug-related activities on the environment

Co-sponsored by: Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, France, Ghana, Honduras, Japan, Morocco, Switzerland, United Kingdom.



In favour: 48  
Against: 2  
Abstentions: 1  
Absent: 2

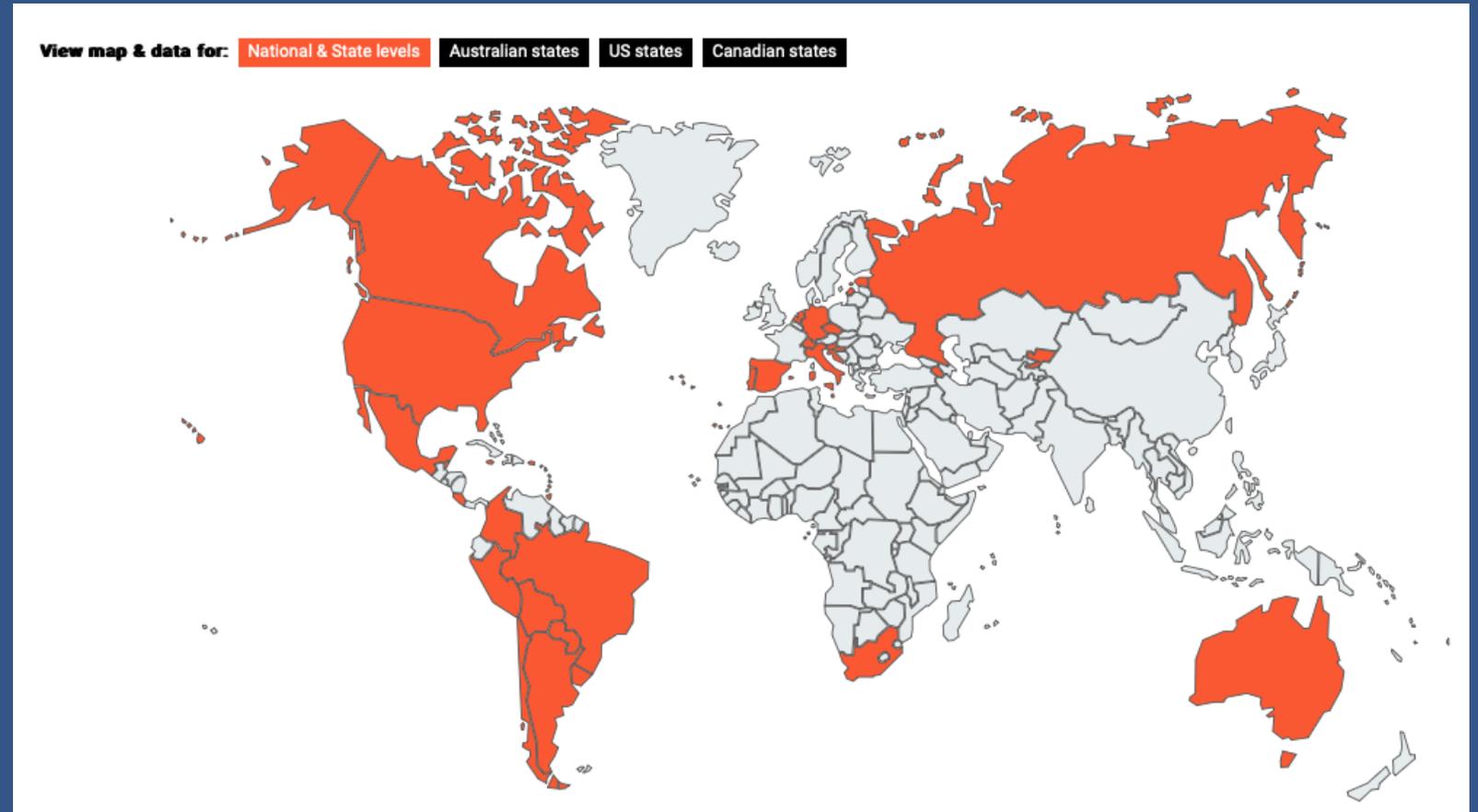


# Global support for Ending Criminal Sanctions for Personal Possession / Use



## More and more countries are moving towards decriminalisation...

- 59 jurisdictions in 39 countries have decriminalised
- Half of these reforms took place in the past 10 years!



## THE GOLD STANDARD OF **DECRIMINALISATION**

IDPC's gold standard of decriminalisation is the removal of all sanctions for drug use and related activities, including possession, acquisition, purchase, cultivation and possession of drug use paraphernalia. An increasing number of governments, the United Nations, civil society groups, networks of people who use drugs and academics around the world have acknowledged the urgent need for decriminalisation.

### 1. Don't punish

**Remove all sanctions for drug use and related activities, for all substances**



### 2. Support

**Promote voluntary access to systems of care and support**



### 3. Community engagement

**Meaningfully involve people who use drugs in design and monitoring**



### 4. Redress

**Expunge previous convictions and develop reparations for affected communities**



### 5. Compliance

**Comprehensively train authorities to ensure implementation and adherence**



### 6. Health & rights

**Redirect resources away from punitive systems towards rights-affirming services**



This infographic was developed by the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) based on the Drug Decriminalisation [e]Course and Decriminalisation of people who use drugs: A guide for advocacy, user-friendly resources for people from all sectors who wish to understand the key objectives, principles and concepts relating to decriminalisation of drug use and how to advocate for it. You can find the [e]Course, the Guide, and more information and useful materials on decriminalisation, at [www.idpc.net/decriminalisation](http://www.idpc.net/decriminalisation)

# Drug policy in ASEAN: 2016 - 2025

## ASEAN Workplan – Key sections:

1. Preventive Education
2. Law Enforcement
3. Treatment and Rehabilitation
4. Alternative Development
5. Research



**apcom** EQUITY. DIGNITY. SOCIAL JUSTICE.  
**DPAG** มูลนิธิเพื่อสิทธิชุมชนที่ก้าวหน้า  
**FOUNDTION for ACTION on INCLUSION RIGHTS**  
**HAYAT** Life Alive  
**idpc** International Drug Policy Consortium  
**IHRI** INHUMAN DRUGS. HUMAN RIGHTS. HUMANIZATION  
**LBHM** LEMBAGA BANTUAN HUKUM MASYARAKAT  
**NAPUD** NETWORK OF ASIAN PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS  
**NoBox Philippines**  
**ssdp** Students for Sensible Drug Policy PHILIPPINES  
**WHRIN**

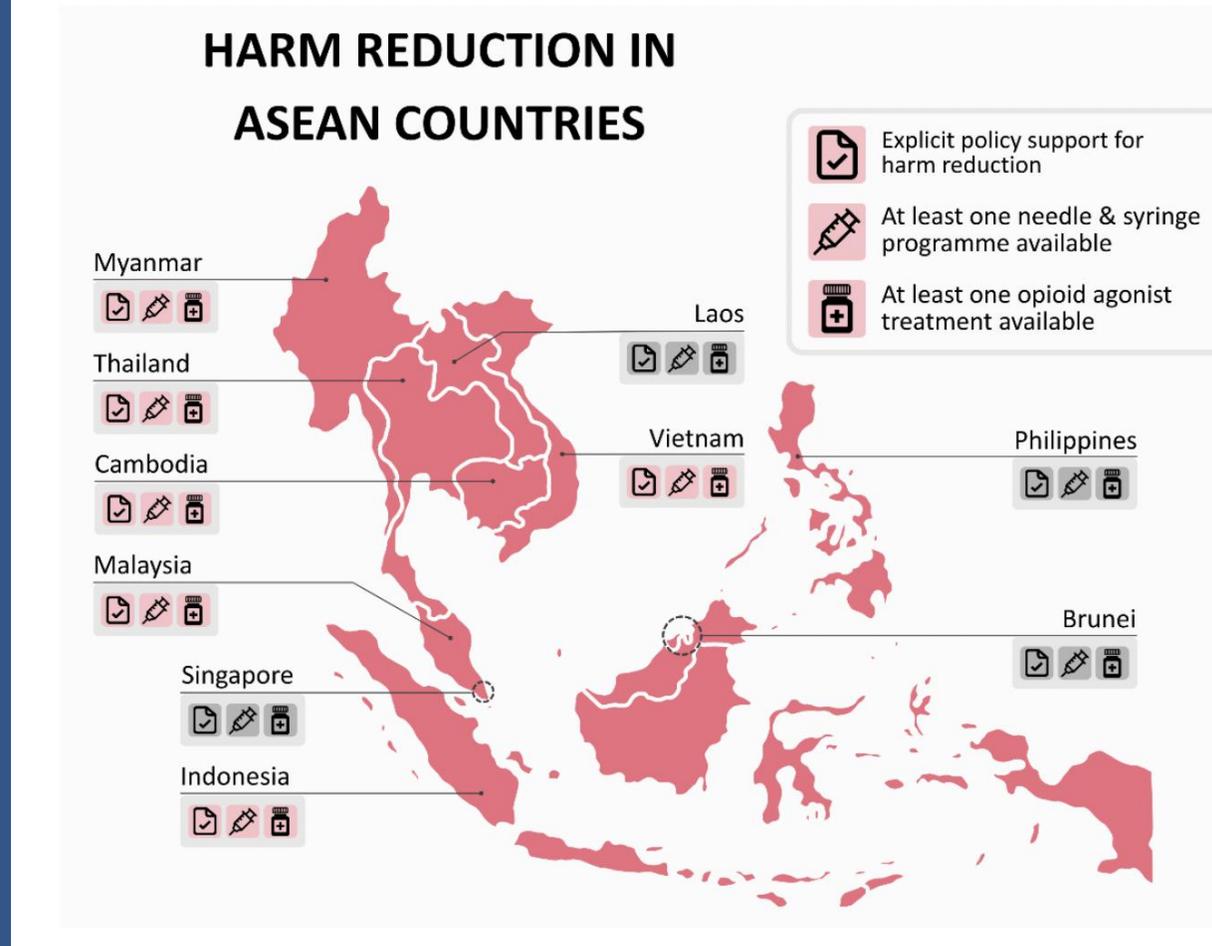
**The ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016 – 2025: A Civil Society Perspective on its implementation and impacts**

# Harm Reduction in ASEAN

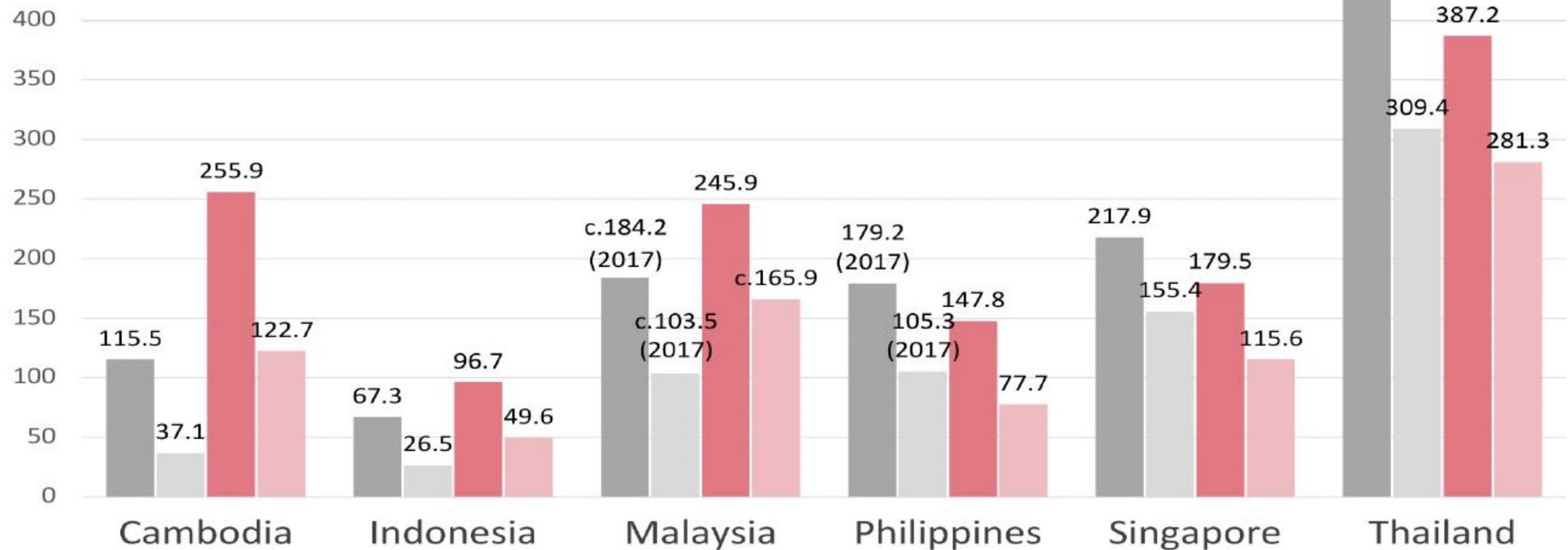
- Despite evidence of effectiveness, harm reduction services remain too limited with little to no government support.
- NGO programmes by Karisma and SCDI should be invested in and scaled up.
- ASEAN Drug Monitoring Report 2023 report recommends:

“Effective public health strategies, including prevention, treatment, and harm reduction, are essential to complement enforcement efforts and address the root causes.”

\*Adapted from Harm Reduction International's *The Global State of Harm Reduction 2024*



# Prison populations and proportion held for drug offences in six ASEAN countries (2016 & 2024)



■ 2016 - Total prison population

■ 2016 - Prison population (drug offences)

■ 2024 - Total prison population

■ 2024 - Prison population (drug offences)



# Overall Recommendations to ASEAN

- A. Reorient drug policies towards achieving improved outcomes for the health and welfare of communities, instead of “drug-free” goals.
- B. Rethink the vision of success and the metrics used to measure it.
- C. Pursue evidence-based policies that align with international standards and result in better outcomes for communities.
- D. Meaningfully involve people impacted by drug policies, including intersectional groups of people who use drugs, formerly incarcerated people, farmers and civil society.

## The specific situation of Southeast Asia

- Most countries criminalise consumption, not just possession – what have been the impacts? How does this pose barriers to pursuing a health response to drugs?
- We need much more than decriminalisation, e.g. depending on the needs of a specific context: drug consumption / safe injection sites, drug checking, safer supply and legal regulation alongside housing, employment, education and addressing structural inequalities.

# Resources on decriminalisation

- Interactive map
- Advocacy guide on decriminalisation
- Briefing on decriminalisation
- Drug decriminalisation e-course:  
<https://idpc.healthfoundation.eu>

HEALTH [e] FOUNDATION  idpc

 My courses App Guides ▾

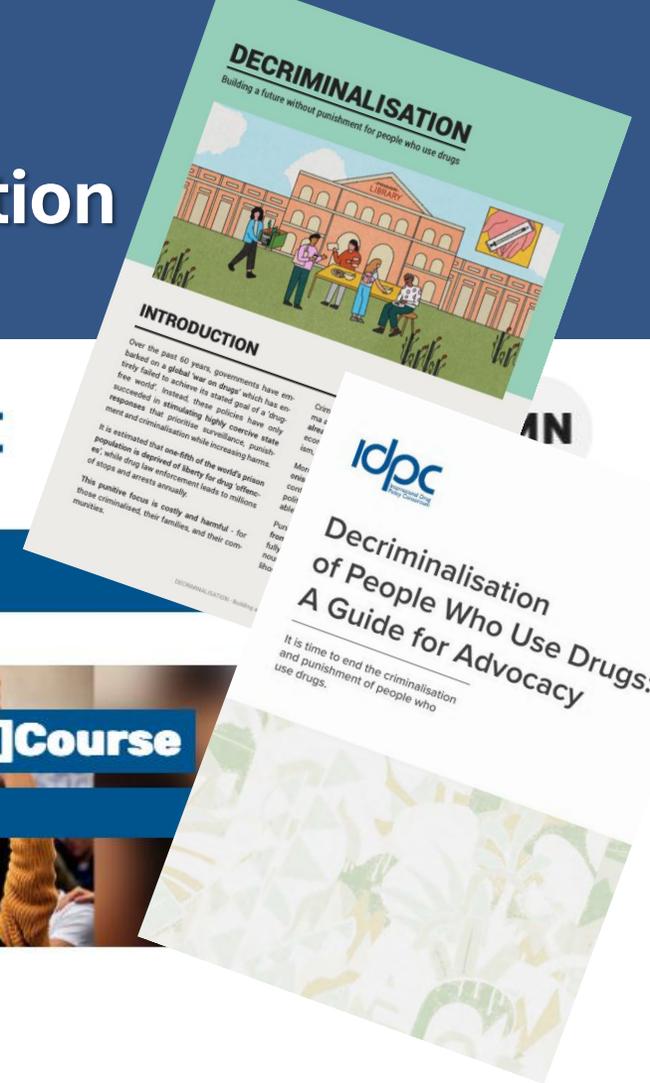
## Drug Decriminalisation [e]Course

Drug use should not be a crime

**DRUG DECRIMINALISATION [E]COURSE**

## Welcome

Welcome to the Drug Decriminalisation [e]Course! Across seven interactive, engaging modules, the Drug Decriminalisation [e]Course course will provide you with videos, exercises, and key information that will equip you to help move the world towards decriminalisation and away from the war on drugs. For more information on this course, please watch the following video.





Thank you!

[glai@idpc.net](mailto:glai@idpc.net)

[www.idpc.net](http://www.idpc.net)