

# New global drug policy index finds most countries fail drug policy

The drug policy median score across all 30 countries for humane and health driven drug policies is just 48/100, with Norway, despite topping the inaugural edition of the Global Drug Policy Index, still only managing a score of 74/100. The other four leading countries are New Zealand, Portugal, the UK and Australia, with Brazil, Uganda, Indonesia, Kenya, and Mexico the five lowest-ranking countries.



Source: ©luis carlos jimenez del rio [123rf](#)

"Forty-eight (48) out of 100 is a drug policy fail in anyone's book," said Ann Fordham, executive director of the International Drug Policy Consortium which led on the development of the Index with the partners in the Harm Reduction Consortium.

"None of the countries assessed should feel good about their score on drug policy, because no country has reached a perfect score. Or anywhere near it. This Index highlights the huge room for improvement across the board," she adds.

## Repressive approach to drug control

For decades, tracking how well - or badly - governments are doing in drug policy has been an elusive endeavour.

"In no small part, this is because data collection efforts by both governments and the UN have been driven by the outdated and harmful goal of achieving a 'drug-free society,'" says Fordham.

Most governments continue to employ a repressive approach to drug control based on this skewed data, which in turns means they cannot be held accountable for the damage their policies inflict on the lives of so many people.

"The success of drug policies has not been measured against health, development, and human rights outcomes, but instead has tended to prioritise indicators such as the numbers of people arrested or imprisoned for drug offences, the amount of drugs seized, or the number of hectares of drug crops eradicated," she explains.

## Radical innovation

The Global Drug Policy Index is the first-ever data-driven global analysis of drug policies and their implementation.

*It is composed of 75 indicators running across five broad dimensions of drug policy*

- Criminal justice.
- Extreme responses.
- Health and harm reduction.
- Access to internationally controlled medicines.
- Development.

"The Global Drug Policy Index is nothing short of a radical innovation,' said Helen Clark, chair of the global commission on Drug Policy and former prime minister of New Zealand.

"Good, accurate data is power, and it can help us end the 'war on drugs' sooner rather than later," she says.

## Progress is needed

"What's clear from the results is that no government can be complacent," said Julita Lemgruber, former director of the Prison System of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

"Even in the highest-ranking countries, progress is sorely needed.

"Governments worldwide must abandon the idea of drug policies as instruments of "war" and understand them as means to promote human rights and citizenship."

*The Index's results reflect that:*

- The militarised and law enforcement approach to drug control continues to prevail. Some level of lethal use of force by military or police forces was reported in half of the countries surveyed, with widespread cases in Mexico and Brazil.
- The disproportionate impact of drug control on marginalised people on the basis of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status was reported to some extent across all dimensions, and across all countries.
- Drug law enforcement targets primarily nonviolent offences, and especially people who use drugs. Only eight out of the 30 countries surveyed have decriminalised drug use and possession, and out of those, only three managed to truly divert people away from the criminal justice system.
- The funding gap for harm reduction remains highly concerning. Only five out of 30 countries have allocated 'adequate' funding to harm reduction, and of those countries, funding is considered secure in only one (Norway).
- There is a huge gap between government policies and their implementation on ensuring access to controlled medicines, especially in countries like India, Indonesia, Mexico, and Senegal which score high on policy, but score 0/100 for actual availability for those in need.
- Alternative development programmes in areas of illegal cultivation remains entrenched in interdiction and eradication, with Colombia scoring particularly low (23/100) due to its militarised strategy focusing on forced eradication and the harmful use of aerial spraying.

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