



GTZ Advisory Services

Development-oriented Drug Control

Module 5: Harm reduction

The number of HIV infections due to injecting drug use, mostly through sharing unsanitary hypodermic needles, has increased dramatically in recent years. To reduce high-risk behaviour among injecting drug users, GTZ offers a harm reduction approach. The harm reduction method aims to lead drug users step by step to further assistance through measures that are non-judgemental and foster safer use. The target groups are often marginalised high-risk drug users who are essentially beyond the reach of conventional addiction services. The aim is to prevent negative health consequences, such as HIV/AIDS infection and drug-related deaths, and thus to stabilize both the addicts' health and their social circumstances and to improve their quality of life.

Complete renunciation of drugs is neither a condition for nor an immediate goal of the harm reduction approach. The aim is to integrate those affected step by step into drug-assistance programmes which advance them toward an independent and self-sufficient way of life.

GTZ's experience and impacts

GTZ has long-standing experience in harm reduction, and has highly qualified international expertise at its disposal. GTZ's experience has shown that harm reduction is an efficient strategy to reach marginalised target groups that have otherwise been hard to reach with mainstream drug services.

Among harm reduction measures are, for example, needle-exchange programmes to prevent HIV/AIDS, substitution programmes (the provision of drug substitutes such as methadone) and the creation of low-risk consumption locations.

In the long term, harm reduction:

- can prevent overdoses, serious health damage at the individual level and a downward slide of addicts into poverty, crime and social marginalization, thus reducing mortality and morbidity of drug users;
- has positive effects at the societal level, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, social stability and crime prevention;
- stabilises the living conditions of drug addicts and thereby promotes responsible behaviour: for example, regarding their families.

The harm reduction approach is part of the GTZ's service package for Development-oriented Drug Control.



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GTZ's service package

The GTZ service package on harm reduction consists of a range of advisory services, which can be offered to international clients separately or in combination:

- **Providing policy advisory services**
GTZ provides strategic advice on drug policy reforms and juridical reforms and promotes the integration of harm reduction approaches into various institutions and policy concepts.
- **Developing adapted concepts**
The development of a participatory and target-group-oriented harm reduction concept is a central pillar of GTZ's services.
- **Improving access to help systems**
GTZ promotes the extension of addiction networks and improves the access of marginalized addicts, in particular, to such supportive systems and networks.
- **Integrating harm reduction into existing programmes**
GTZ supports the adaptation and integration of harm reduction measures into existing drug addiction services.
- **Supporting capacity building**
In order to ensure sustainability and local ownership, GTZ offers drug-related health education and capacity-building measures to partners.
- **Promoting needle-sharing programmes**
GTZ assists partners in the implementation of needle-sharing programmes to prevent HIV/AIDS infections and other blood-borne diseases.
- **Implementing substitution programmes**
GTZ supports substitution programmes in order to reduce the risks related to unclean 'street drugs', avoid overdoses, ensure continuous medical care, and prevent drug users' involvement in criminal activities.
- **Creating low-risk consumption conditions**
GTZ supports the installation of low-risk consumer rooms, which ensure hygienic and safe consumption locations. Trained personnel provide counselling and guidance toward less risky patterns of drug use.
- **Providing supplementary services**
GTZ provides demand-based project advisory and support services throughout a project lifetime.

For further information, please contact

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