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**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,
regional and international levels of all
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the
world drug problem**

Statement submitted by International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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*** Issued without formal editing.



Disclaimer: This NGO paper is an abridged version of the IDPC Advocacy Note “A captured gatekeeper: An evaluation of drug NGO access to ECOSOC accreditation and the UN Committee of NGOs”. The full version is available here: <https://idpc.net/publications/2022/03/a-captured-gatekeeper-an-evaluation-of-drug-ngo-access-to-ecosoc-accreditation-and-the-un-committee-on-ngos>.

Ensuring civil society participation at the United Nations

An evaluation of drug NGO access to ECOSOC accreditation and the role of the United Nations Committee on NGOs

Introduction

The United Nations has long recognized the role of civil society as a key component of effective decision-making at all levels of governance. Yet, civil society faces significant barriers in accessing the decision-making table, including at the United Nations. One of these obstacles is the inability to obtain accreditation from the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which would enable them to engage in key United Nations policymaking forums such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

Research by IDPC has shown that NGOs working on drug-related issues are facing increasing difficulties in obtaining ECOSOC status, particularly when facing questioning at the United Nations Committee on NGOs – the ECOSOC standing committee tasked with considering NGO applications to ECOSOC status.

In April 2022, the 54 ECOSOC members¹ will vote on the membership of the Committee for 2023 to 2026. In February 2022, 359 NGOs raised concerns over these upcoming elections, calling for States with a positive track record on civil society engagement to run as candidates, and for the elections to be competitive and fair.²

As of February 2022, information available about the upcoming elections showed that 60 per cent of candidate States were considered to have a “closed” or “repressed” civil society space.³ Even more concerning is the fact that, so far, in most regional groups the number of candidate countries equated the number of seats available. This means that if they were held today, the elections would not be competitive, and countries that have been active in blocking NGO access to the United Nations would have a guaranteed seat in the Committee.

The process for reviewing NGOs at the Committee⁴

To access ECOSOC status, an NGO must be recommended by the Committee on NGOs. During this review, if a State asks a question to the NGO, the application is deferred to the next session of the Committee. If no question or objection is voiced, the application is recommended by consensus.

Although rare in practice, any State can request a roll-call vote on a particular application, asking to either recommend or reject it. When an application is turned down by the Committee on NGOs, the NGO can bring the case to ECOSOC, which takes a final decision by vote. If an NGO is rejected, the application is closed and the organization can only apply again after three years.

Methodology

IDPC conducted a systematic analysis of how the Committee on NGOs has reviewed applications for ECOSOC status by drug NGOs during the period of 2017–2021.

First, we extracted the data concerning all NGO reviews conducted by the Committee over the past five years from the minutes available online;⁵ this resulted in a primary

data set comprising 5,251 NGO reviews. Second, we cross-referenced this data set with the membership of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC)⁶ and the New York NGO Committee on Drugs (NYNGOC),⁷ the two umbrella organizations that coordinate NGO participation in United Nations drug policy-making forums, as well as with the membership of IDPC;⁸ we also selected NGOs that had the English key words “drug(s)”, “narcotic(s)”, and “harm reduction” in their official name.

It should be noted that we might have missed drug organizations that did not meet any of these criteria, for instance because they are not members of the umbrella organizations, or because the name under which they are registered in the umbrella organizations is different than the name used to apply to ECOSOC status. Error in the manual coding of the data set is also possible and should be factored in as another limitation.

The impacts on NGOs working on drug-related issues

In five years, the percentage of drug NGOs recommended by the Committee dropped from 74 per cent in 2017 to 51 per cent in 2021. For organizations that are members of the IDPC network, the rate of recommendation plummeted from 64 per cent to 11 per cent.

Figure 1
Drug NGOs reviewed by the Committee on NGOs between 2017 and 2021

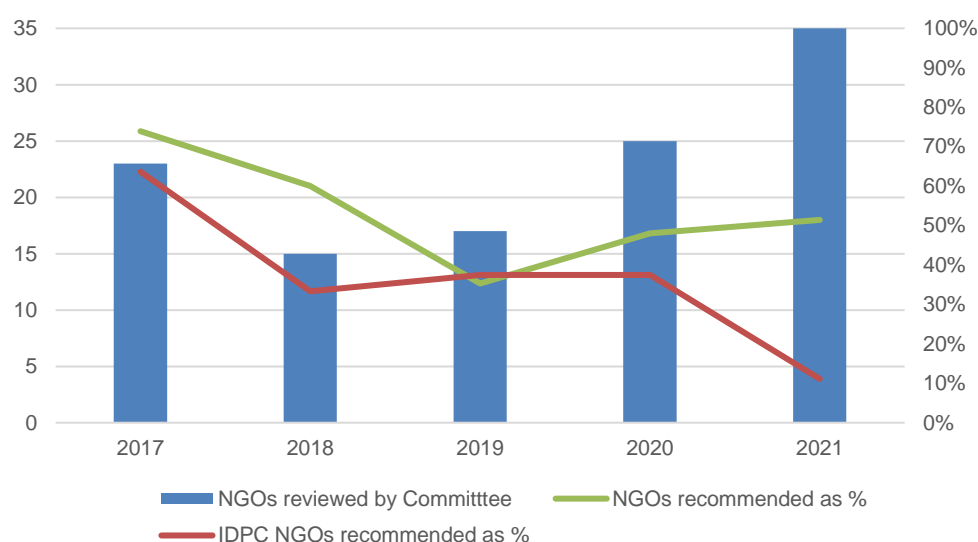


Figure 2
Questions asked to drug NGOs at the Committee on NGO, year by year

Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Burundi	2	0	0	1	0	3
China	2	1	3	1	3	10
Cuba	4	5	0	1	3	13
Greece	0	0	0	0	3	3
India	0	1	3	0	0	4
Libya	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mauritania	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mexico	0	0	3	0	0	3
Nicaragua	2	1	1	1	0	5
Pakistan	1	0	1	2	1	5

<i>Country</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>Total</i>
Russian Federation	5	4	8	5	18	40
South Africa	3	0	0	0	0	3
Sudan	1	0	1	0	0	2
Turkey	0	0	1	1	1	3
Venezuela	0	1	0	0	0	1
United States of America	1	0	2	1	6	10

By the end of 2021, at least 17 drug NGOs had not been able to access ECOSOC status because the Committee had deferred their application. Out of these organizations, eight have undergone at least four rounds of questioning and still have not obtained ECOSOC status. One emblematic example of these protracted referrals is Youth Rise, which went through 10 rounds of questioning between 2017 and 2021, until it was finally recommended for ECOSOC status in May 2021. Another example is that of the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice which has undergone 11 rounds of questioning between 2017 and 2021 and is still awaiting to receive ECOSOC accreditation.

Figure 3

Drug NGOs waiting for ECOSOC accreditation as of February 2022

<i>Drug NGOs waiting for ECOSOC accreditation</i>	<i>Rounds of questioning</i>	<i>Questioning country</i>
The Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice	11	China, Nicaragua, Russian Federation
Association of Non-for-Profit Organizations to Facilitate the Drug Prevention and Socially Dangerous Behaviour “National Anti-Drug Union”	6	United States, Mexico
Drug Policy Network South-East Europe	5	Russian Federation
“Institute for the Study of Dependencies, Drug Policy Issues and Monitoring the Drug Situation”	5	Libya, Russian Federation
Drug Free Pakistan Foundation	4	India, Mexico, Pakistan
INPUD Limited	4	Russian Federation
The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime	4	China, Russian Federation, Turkey
Treatment Action Group	4	China, Cuba
Foreningen Tryggere Ruspolitikk	3	Russian Federation
Fondazioni “Yesilay”	2	Greece
Inštitut za raziskave in razvoj “Utrip”	2	Russian Federation
Somali Green Crescent Society	2	United States
Associazione Luca Coscioni	2	Cuba, Russian Federation
De Regenboog Groep	2	Russian Federation
Instituto RIA	2	Russian Federation

<i>Drug NGOs waiting for ECOSOC accreditation</i>	<i>Rounds of questioning</i>	<i>Questioning country</i>
Zeleni Polumjesec (Green Crescent)	1	Greece
Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia Inc.	1	Russian Federation

Recommendations⁹

- We encourage all 54 ECOSOC members to vote only for candidates with positive track records on civil society involvement, based on indicators such as rating in the CIVICUS monitor, support for United Nations resolutions on civil society space and human rights defenders; responses to cases of intimidation and reprisals; and national-level initiatives to safeguard civic space and human rights. Countries committed to civil society participation at the United Nations should consider running for the Committee themselves.
- We encourage all regions to put up competitive slates. Competitive elections are important to encourage States to be accountable for their commitments to civil society involvement.
- We encourage Vienna delegations to raise concerns about restrictions in access to ECOSOC status for drug NGOs at informal meetings with other missions in Vienna. These meetings should be held both with like-minded members of the Committee to ensure that they can prioritize the most targeted NGOs in negotiations within the Committee on NGOs, and with those countries highlighted above as being the most active in deferring NGO applications in an effort to exert diplomatic pressure on them.
- We encourage CND delegates to deliver statements at the 65th session of the Commission raising concerns over the shrinking space for civil society, and specifically highlighting the targeting of drug NGOs at the Committee on NGOs.

Endnotes

- ¹ List of countries represented at the Economic and Social Council: www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/members.
- ² For more information see: <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/349-ngos-call-for-positive-elections-to-un-body-that-opens-doors-to-civil-society/>.
- ³ For more details, see: <https://idpc.net/publications/2022/03/a-captured-gatekeeper-an-evaluation-of-drug-ngo-access-to-ecosoc-accreditation-and-the-un-committee-on-ngos>.
- ⁴ For more information see: https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ishr_ngo_handbook_2017_eng_web.pdf.
- ⁵ All available on the United Nations website: www.un.org/press/en/committee-non-governmental-organizations.
- ⁶ See website: <https://vngoc.org/>.
- ⁷ See website: www.facebook.com/NewYorkNGOC/.
- ⁸ See list of members: <https://idpc.net/members>.
- ⁹ Several of these recommendations are taken from: <https://ishr.ch/action/campaigns/openthedoor2ngos/>.