



To the President of the Italian Council of Ministers  
On. Enrico Letta

To the Heads of Parliamentary Groups

To the Regions' Presidents

To the President of ANCI (National Association on Municipalities)

To Italian City Majors

cc: Anti-Drugs Policy Department (DPA)

*Summary in English from the original in Italian*

**ITARDD** is a network of service providers, drug users, associations and local authorities which promotes Harm Reduction in Italy through research, information, networking of competencies and projects, information and awareness raising actions. ITARDD is member of the European Harm Reduction Network.

ITARDD denounces the disappearance the word “harm reduction” – one of the four pillars of European drug policies - from the Italian vocabulary. Harm reduction is promoted in Europe as a holistic approach to drug related interventions. In Italy, on the contrary, harm reduction services are not supported by a government which rather denies the value of harm reduction in national policies and international fora.

The general objective of harm reduction is to limit risks and harms related to the use of drugs. Harm reduction supports people who use drugs, their family and communities and the society as a whole through health promotion, and the promotion of individual and collective well being as well as human rights.

Harm reduction creates a bridge between people who whose drugs and care services; it allows to develop a better understanding of drug use, prevent infections, reduce overdoses, support the access to care, address social marginalisation of drug users and guarantee inclusion for people using drugs and problematic drug users.

It is due time for Italy's political debate on drugs to restart, inspired by evidence-based policies promoted at European level, rather than on moralistic and ideological positions.

In recent years the Anti-drugs Policy Department (DPA) operated in total asynchrony with services on the ground and evidence from research. The National Drug Policy Conferences have not been organised for years, in spite of the legislative requirements (law 309/90) to have a space for evaluation of policies and services and development of national guidelines for effective and coordinated interventions.

Appropriate information campaigns on the risk related to drug use have disappeared, in favour of moralistic messages supported by a sensationalistic media system, which have proven unsuccessful. Information campaigns on AIDS are also mostly limited to the 1 December anniversary.

In the meantime, some Italian Municipalities have implemented extremely expensive, but ineffective and stigmatising campaigns (*“Drug on the streets”*, *“Who uses drugs is a mafia supporter”*), which only result in further marginalisation and isolation of drug users. In times of economic crisis, the costs of such campaigns are unacceptable (43M Euros in 3 years), in particular in view of the drastic cuts in funding of Regions and Municipalities to health and social services.

Data from the field on drug use trends and infections contradict the DPA’s questionable positive statements on the reduction in drug use.

The entire care sector for drug use is suffering and harm reduction services are paying the higher price, contrary to the European pragmatic and inclusive approaches where harm reduction plays a key role and innovative services are continuously introduced, for example in countries such as Spain and Germany.

We are sanctioned by the European Union on the state of overcrowding and violation of human rights in Italian prisons, also thanks to the very oppressive immigration (law *“Bossi-Fini”*) and drug policies (law *“Fini-Giovanardi”*) penalising possession and therefore small drug dealers, often migrants. Any therapeutic intervention in prison is impossible in the present conditions.

We have often addressed the DPA with these problems, but the answer has rather been a government’s position which still operates to eliminate harm reduction in national, European and international documents and fora, where the Italy is now well known for its anachronistic positions.

In conclusion, ITARDD requests for:

- The urgent convocation of the National Drugs Conference, as foreseen by law, which needs to play a key role in the evaluation and further development of drug related and harm reduction policies;
- The need for the competent Ministries – Welfare and Health - to be in charge of drug policies, rather than DPA. We also ask for Dr Serpelloni, DPA’s head, to resign, in view of the counterproductive effects of his approach on drug use and the violation of rights of people who use drugs, their families and communities, prisoners, care professionals.
- Harm reduction to re-gain a key role within local policies and interventions for its potentials in innovation, pragmatism, proximity. For people who use drugs to have a say in choices which matter for their health and lives and for self-regulation in use to become a possible horizon;
- The *“Fini-Giovanardi”* law to be repealed, not only for its supposed unconstitutionality. After 8 years of damages, we believe policies need to look at a potential derealisation of use and full recognition of the value of harm reduction, alongside with other policies and interventions.
- For the approval of legislation needed at least for the legalisation of cannabis derivatives, to protect in particular young users from risks of the illegal market;
- The increase of resources for effective and evidence-based welfare interventions, which reach the local territories – instead of being managed only by DPA;

We hope that people who receive this letter understand how dramatic the situation is for millions of Italians and we invite them to urge for a revised approach on health and social issues in our

country, based on evaluation, evidence, rationalisation, and with a view to respect and promote human rights of all.

Best wishes  
ITARDD network

For subscription and information: [segreteria.itardd@gmail.com](mailto:segreteria.itardd@gmail.com)