



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

**ACERWC DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN
FROM SUBSTANCE USE**

OUTCOME STATEMENT

Acknowledging that the recognition of substance use among children as a public health concern presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen the protection of children's rights;

Bearing in mind that substance use impedes the full development of a child and results in a violation of a myriad of children's rights;

Being cognizant of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the ACERWC General Comment on state party obligations; Africa's Agenda for Children 2040; the Common African Position for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem; and the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention;

Noting the commendable efforts by African Union Member States in devising national strategies that recognize and combat the escalating issue of substance use among children;

Deeply concerned about the proliferation of harmful substances that are easily accessible by young people, the alarming number of young people in Africa who develop substance use problems and seek treatment, and the grossly inadequate availability of substance use prevention and treatment services for children;

Concerned by the lack of prevalence, harmonized and reliable data on substance use among children, which hinders the development of effective interventions at both the national and continental levels;

Noting the imperative of utilizing evidence-based prevention measures to protect children from substance use. Substance use prevention can be accomplished through early preventive education, screening, and brief intervention within the healthcare sector, as well as through parenting programs and mainstreaming psychosocial support approaches across various sectors;

Recognizing the critical role that can be played by the Member States, the African Union Commission, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organisations, parents, guardians, and caretakers in addressing and mitigating the impact of substance use on children's rights;

We, the participants of the Day of General Discussion on the Protection of Children from Substance Use on 29 April 2023,

1. Urge Member States of the African Union to:

- Ensure access to treatment and care services by victims of substance use and abuse in collaboration with health and social support service providers;
- Promote evidence-based prevention and treatment of substance use among young people;
- Adopt appropriate regulatory frameworks to hold businesses accountable as active stakeholders where they are found to have advertised and supplied psychotropic substances to children, including through the internet;
- Ensure child participation in the formulation and implementation of policy frameworks aimed at protecting children from substance use to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met;

- Strengthen engagements with parents, caregivers, schools, and communities when designing and implementing comprehensive substance prevention initiatives;
- Ensure the application and adoption of child protective and child sensitive approaches that address substance use. Member States must consider children who use substances as victims and provide the appropriate peer counselling and psychosocial support;
- Prioritize enhancing the capacity and accountability of law enforcement agencies to enforce existing laws and regulations on substance use, in order to curb substance use and trafficking;
- Work towards improving the availability and quality of health care services for substance users, with a particular emphasis on harm reduction, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery, to promote the well-being of those affected by substance use; and
- Ensure that the four guiding principles of the African Children's Charter are applied in the development and implementation of policies, programs, and measures aimed at protecting children from substance use.

2. Urge the African Union Commission to:

- Establish and strengthen national drug epidemiology networks in Africa linked to the Pan African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use to improve substance use monitoring and analysis across the continent;
- Establish an inclusive and balanced African Civil Society platform, drawing on expertise from researchers, practitioners and policy makers to facilitate a concerted response and engage in informed dialogues on regional substance use reduction initiatives; and
- Ensure the full implementation of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019 - 2023) by supporting Member States in combating drug trafficking and organized crime.

3. Urge the ACERWC to:

- Encourage and support Member States to develop and implement comprehensive national strategies that focus on prevention, early detection, and treatment of substance use among children;
- Engage with State Parties during reporting procedures to evaluate the extent to which they are implementing measures to protect children from substance use;
- Develop guiding resources that provide a detailed analysis of the Charter's provisions and their relevance to protecting children from substance use to support the development of Member States' capacity to tackle substance use; and
- Develop a General Comment on article 28 of the African Children's Charter, focusing on protecting children from narcotics and psychotropic substances defined in international treaties and preventing their use in the production and trafficking of such substances.

4. Urge Civil Society Organisations to:

- Undertake awareness-raising through targeted campaigns, workshops or community outreach programs for children, parents, guardians, caretakers, and other stakeholders about the harms of substance use on children's development and rights;
- Integrate parenting programs, peer education and life skill interventions, with specific emphasis on substance use reductions, into programs targeting children;
- Collaborate with healthcare providers and other stakeholders to promote early preventive education, screening, and brief intervention programs for children at risk of substance use; and
- Advocate for the development of a harmonized and reliable system for collecting and analyzing data on substance use among children in Africa to help in the

development of effective interventions at both the national and continental levels.

Adopted on 29 April 2023, Maseru, Lesotho