Punitive drug laws are failing, says minister

Home Office study finds no evidence that harsh sentencing curbs illegal use

Alan Travis
Home affairs editor

There is no evidence that tough enforcement of the drug laws on personal possession leads to lowering levels of drug use, according to the government’s first evidence-based study.

Examining international drug laws, the groundbreaking Home Office document published today brings to an end years of almost unbroken official political rhetoric that only harsher penalties can effectively reduce drug-related deaths and admissions to high dependency treatment. It finds that it makes no sense to waste public money on the failed war on drugs.

Washington and Colorado, and in Uruguay. It says that “it is too early to know how they will play out but we will monitor the impacts of these new policies in the years to come”.

Regarding legal highs, Baker said the government would look at the feasibility of a blanket ban on new compounds of psychoactive drugs that focused on dealers and the “head shops” that sell tobacco paraphernalia rather than users. “The head shops could be left with nothing to sell but Rizla papers,” Baker
OUR VISION

An end to the war on drugs and the establishment of effective and humane systems of drug regulation

OUR MISSION

We will inspire countries to explore and establish the legal regulation of drugs

OUR GOALS

• Normalise and build trust in legal regulation with a range of audiences nationally and internationally

• Engage the many policy sectors impacted by the war on drugs to help bring the reform debate into the political mainstream

• Support and encourage a coalition of Latin American governments to call for the war on drugs to be replaced with legal regulation

• Maximise Transform’s impact among policymakers by reaching a wide public audience, targeting key individuals and winning over the media
Transform’s achievements this year are testimony to how far the organisation and the reform cause have progressed in the last 20 years. In particular, we were honoured to be invited to work with the prestigious Global Commission on Drug Policy – led by Kofi Annan and a host of former presidents – on their new report, ‘Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work’. Not only does this title echo our organisational tagline, ‘Getting Drugs Under Control’, but by calling for legal regulation the report underlines that the campaign for reform is now moving to the centre of international discourse.

Transform also supported the sponsors of the first parliamentary debate for years on UK drug policy, and diverse media channels, from the Sun to the New York Times, joined calls for moves towards a regulatory regime, while our authoritative publications and blogs reached unprecedented numbers.

It is gratifying to observe how such a small expert organisation can, with its partners, help nudge the world towards what promises to be a major transformation of a failing approach. As the debate continues its move into the mainstream, Transform believes there is an opportunity to speak to a wider audience and challenge lazy assumptions. Our new project, Anyone’s Child: Families for Safer Drug Control, fronted by the inspirational bereaved mother Anne-Marie Cockburn, is set to make a major contribution to that wider debate.

The dynamic policy environment at home and abroad means that there are more calls than ever on our resources. The trustees have greatly appreciated the unflagging energy and dedication of the staff, led by the outgoing Caroline Pringle. In response to this opportunity and challenge we are appointing a full-time Chief Executive and have streamlined our governance structures.

But we could not make progress without the continued support of our loyal donors and supporters, and we encourage anyone sympathetic to our cause to contribute to the best of their ability. To coin someone else’s slogan this time, you really can help us make a difference. Once you have had a look at this report, please do get in touch.
THE GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY

The influential Global Commission on Drug Policy – whose members include Kofi Annan and eight former heads of state – commissioned Transform to provide technical assistance and be part of the drafting team for their latest report, ‘Taking Control: Pathways to Drug Policies that Work’. This new report built on the Commission’s first publication, produced in 2011, by exploring the specific details of how models of regulation could operate in a post-prohibition world.

With an eye on the upcoming 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on drugs (UNGASS), the report also placed the regulation debate within the context of a wider need to modernise the global drug control framework established by the UN drug treaties. The Commission is the most distinguished group of high-level leaders ever to call for such far-reaching reform.

Released in September 2014, the report generated huge media coverage globally, demonstrating the legitimacy of the arguments for legal regulation to a wider and more mainstream audience. Transform attended the New York launch of the report and participated in the discussions, preparations and media activity around it.

Work to ensure that the report impacts on policy makers has begun, with the Commissioners presenting it at high-level forums across the world, including the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) in Guatemala, the Mexican House of Deputies, and to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York. As a result, it is already being proposed as the basis for a manifesto for progressive countries to rally around at the upcoming UNGASS in 2016.
The Global Commission on Drug Policy commends the progressive and high-quality contributions of Transform to the wider international debate on ending the war against drugs. The organization provided an important contribution to the 2014 report entitled ‘Taking Control: Pathways for Drug Policies that Work’. Transform personnel bring energy and enthusiasm to the table and are recognized for their enduring commitment to more humane, public health oriented and rights-based approaches to drug policy.
The highlight of Transform’s UK media work in 2014 was the publication of a long-suppressed Home Office report highlighting how its own approach to drugs is not based on evidence. The ‘headline’ finding of the report – which looks at the effectiveness of other countries’ drug policies – is that harsh penalties for drug users have no effect on levels of drug use.

On the same day as the publication of the report, a parliamentary debate on drug policy was held, with the MPs present voting overwhelmingly in favour of an independent impact assessment of the Misuse of Drugs Act.

Coinciding with these developments, the UK’s biggest-selling newspaper, the Sun, published the results of a large-scale opinion poll on drug policy reform, which revealed just how much the public debate has shifted. Among other positive findings, 58% of the UK public were in favour of trials with Portugal’s model of drug decriminalisation, and 71% believed that the war on drugs has failed.

Transform worked solidly behind the scenes in the months leading up to this day, helping to make sure that evidence-based drug policy reform dominated the political and media agenda. As a result, on the day, it was the number one story across all the major UK newspapers and news websites. Transform staff were quoted in the vast majority of the print and online coverage – including in the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph, the Sun, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail – and gave more than 25 broadcast interviews on local and national radio and television.
The chance to reform the UK's backwards drugs policy is finally here – and we cannot waste it. For the first time a wide group of experts have acknowledged that prohibition and popular demand fail.
OTHER UK AND INTERNATIONAL WORK

Additional highlights of Transform’s UK work in 2014 include:

- Running a seminar, in collaboration with Christian Aid, to encourage international development NGOs to engage with the drug policy reform debate
- Continuing our engagement with all UK political parties, including organising a fringe meeting at the Lib Dem party conference, at which the government’s drugs minister Norman Baker MP spoke
- Being nominated in the ‘One to Watch’ category of Prospect Magazine’s Think Tank of the Year Awards
- Working with Sir William Patey, the former ambassador to Afghanistan, as he publicly called for an end to the war on drugs, and the legal regulation of the heroin trade

Transform staff were also invited to present at numerous events on the international stage:

- Briefing journalists on the costs of the war on drugs at a meeting of the UN Correspondents Association in New York
- Presenting at the thematic debate on drug supply reduction at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in Vienna, Austria
- Running workshops for the Open Society Foundations’ West African and Latin American Advocacy Fellowships on Drug Policy Reform
- Other events included the European Harm Reduction Conference, in Switzerland; the International Harm Reduction Conference, in Lithuania; the launch of the European Commission’s Alice Rap project report on cannabis regulation, in Amsterdam; the 2014 International AIDS conference, in Australia; a European Commission expert seminar on novel psychoactive substances, in Barcelona; and a meeting of the New York Bar Association’s Drugs and Crime Committee
Transform’s Danny Kushlick and Anne-Marie Cockburn (second and third from left) at a panel discussion about drugs held by the Sun

Danny Kushlick briefing UN journalists in New York

The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs

The International Harm Reduction Conference, in Lithuania

Alice Rap report launch, in Amsterdam

Danny Kushlick briefing UN journalists in New York
Debating Drugs: How to Make the Case for Legal Regulation

Transform produced a debating guide to equip policy makers with the key arguments needed to win any reform debate. The guide has already been widely disseminated and used in training workshops for a range of policy makers, NGOs and opinion formers.

Country case study briefings

Successful real-world examples of drug policy reform make the prohibitionist position hard to defend. That is why many who oppose reform distort or misrepresent the facts about countries that have tried new approaches. Transform’s authoritative country case studies enable advocates and policymakers to debunk these myths and demonstrate, using the best available evidence, that reform works.

The first two briefings produced as part of this series are ‘Drug decriminalisation in Portugal: Setting the record straight’ and ‘Cannabis policy in the Netherlands: Moving forwards not backwards’. Forthcoming briefings in this series will examine drug policy in Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, the US states of Washington and Colorado, and Uruguay.

Alice Rap project

Transform provided extensive input into a report entitled ‘Cannabis: From prohibition to regulation’, produced as part of the European Commission’s Alice Rap project.

Academic journals

Transform staff were invited to publish a commentary in the journal Addiction, on the challenges for New Zealand’s recently legislated regulatory model for novel psychoactive substances. Transform’s work – in particular our cannabis regulation guide – was discussed or referenced in a range of academic journals, including the British Medical Journal, which drew upon the guide for a cover-story feature on cannabis policy (see page 12).
This guide to winning arguments on legal regulation for recreational drugs is great, like all Transform output.

Dr Ben Goldacre
Award-winning science author
In addition to the extensive media coverage Transform received on 30 October, the organisation maintained its high profile throughout the year, featuring over 100 times in print, online, and on radio and television. We appeared across all major media outlets in the UK, including the Daily Telegraph, the Guardian, the Sun, the Daily Mail, the Daily Mirror, BBC News and Sky News. A few other stand-out moments are listed below:

- Transform was referenced and quoted multiple times in a front-cover article on cannabis regulation in the British Medical Journal. Transform was also recognised for the advice it gave during the production of the piece.

- Transform received international coverage in publications such as the Washington Post, Newsweek, the New Zealand Herald and National Geographic.

- A Transform blog on the World Health Organization’s call for the decriminalisation of personal drug possession went viral, receiving 195,000 page views.

**Online engagement**

Transform has significantly improved its online engagement following the launch of our new website last year:

- Email subscribers have more than doubled, and our online publications are downloaded thousands of times a week.

- Transform is now followed by more than 16,000 people on Twitter, and by over 5,500 on Facebook. Our Twitter followers include policy makers, journalists, government agencies, artists and celebrities.

- Our growing social media presence means that our content, including links to Transform blog analysis, media quotes, and infographics produced in-house, are regularly shared by thousands of supporters to reach an even wider audience.
Drug Trafficking Poses Surprising Threats to Rain Forests, Scientists Find

News

Criminal activities on the environment, sparking calls for drug policy reform.

Trending Now
- Global Drug Use and Drug Policy
- Global Drug Use and Drug Policy
- Global Drug Use and Drug Policy
- Global Drug Use and Drug Policy
- Global Drug Use and Drug Policy

Popular Stories

Drug Legalisation in the UK is a Question of Time

Lisa Sánchez
Transform Drug Policy Foundation

“Countries should work toward developing policies and laws that decriminalize injection and other use of drugs and, thereby, reduce incarceration.”

World Health Organization
Our Latin American programme, run in partnership with México Unido Contra la Delincuencia, continues to build momentum for drug policy reform across the region. Key achievements over the year include:

- Providing technical advice to local and national governments in the region. This has included advising the Mexican Congress, the Chilean Medical Association and Congressional Health Committee, and senior policy makers across the Caribbean
- Producing Spanish translations of Transform’s new cannabis regulation book, debating guide, and country case study briefings
- Launching the Spanish translation of ‘How to Regulate Cannabis: A Practical Guide’ in Mexico, Costa Rica and Chile
- Working with members of the Mexican government, convincing them to take a leadership role in the run-up to the UNGASS 2016
- Facilitating six workshops on how to make the case for drug policy reform, held in Mexico, Chile, Vienna, Colombia, Jamaica and Costa Rica
- Participating in meetings of the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission in Colombia, Guatemala and the US
- Participating in a dialogue on drug policy reform in Medellin, Colombia, organised by the Colombian Ministry of Justice
- Participating in a dialogue of Caribbean policy makers and civil society groups, at the Center for Governance, in Kingston, Jamaica
- Taking part in over 50 regional and international events, including meetings with the Mexican Business Association in Washington DC
- Continuing to provide media comment and analysis to mainstream media outlets across Latin America
Transform’s workshop in Mexico about how to argue for drug law reform in general, and legal regulation in particular, was invaluable. It should be rolled out globally to advocates of drug law reform and all policymakers considering change.

Ambassador Edgar Gutiérrez Girón
Special Mission On Drug Policy Reform, Guatemala
In November 2014, Transform began fundraising for a new public campaign called Anyone’s Child: Families for Safer Drug Control. Working with Anne-Marie Cockburn – who has become a campaigner for drug policy reform since the death of her 15-year-old daughter, Martha, from an ecstasy overdose – the campaign intends to address one of the biggest remaining barriers to widespread reform: the fear that any move away from prohibition would endanger children.

Unscrupulous politicians and elements of the media whip up and play on this fear to further their own agendas. But this emotional response has proved difficult to dispel with evidence and analysis alone. We need to directly counter people’s fears by putting a human face on the costs of the war on drugs, and by having the people who bear these costs tell their stories and explain why they believe there is a better way forward.

Anyone’s Child will show the public that the current approach is endangering their children, and that legal regulation would help keep them safe. To do this, the project will, for the first time, bring together and give a voice to families whose stories will reach and convince the public in a way that no other campaign ever has.

Their perspective will have huge media appeal, help build support for reform among new audiences, and crucially, stop politicians exploiting people’s natural fears for their children to prevent reform.
I am heartened by a touching new project in the UK. Launched by Transform Drug Policy Foundation, Anyone’s Child: Families for Safer Drug Control seeks to put a human face on the costs of the war on drugs and show the public that it is the current approach which is endangering their children, and that legal regulation would help keep them safe.

Sir Richard Branson
Founder of the Virgin Group
Below is our planned programme of work for the next year, for which we are seeking funding.

1. **Anyone’s Child: Families for Safer Drug Control**

   We plan to expand our Anyone’s Child campaign by forging alliances with similar groups around the world, to include a much wider spectrum of families who have been negatively impacted by the war on drugs. We will also be developing a website, briefings and a series of videos to support the campaign.


   We will be updating our 2012 publication, the Alternative World Drug Report, to use as an advocacy and outreach tool in preparation for UNGASS 2016. We will also produce a second volume that includes a series of country case studies and myth-busting briefings that detail real-world alternatives to criminalisation and prohibition.

3. **Preparatory work in the build-up to UNGASS 2016**

   We will continue to engage, inform, coordinate and work strategically with UN agencies, policy makers, country missions, and civil society groups in the lead-up to UNGASS 2016, which promises to be a landmark event for the drug policy reform movement.

4. **Latin American programme**

   We will expand our programme to meet the overwhelming demand from policy makers for expert advice, and play a key role in driving reform across the region.

5. **Study into the harms and benefits of drugs under different drug policy regimes**

   We aim to undertake a study with academic partners, to assess the harms and benefits of various drugs under a range of drug policy regimes, including prohibition and legal regulation.
FINANCES AND PEOPLE

Income
Total incoming resources £249,694

Expenditure
Activities in furtherance of Charity’s objectives: £239,412
Administrative and accountancy expenses: £10,917
Total resources expended: £250,329
Net (deficit): £635
Total funds as of 31/03/2013: £91,477
Total funds as of 31/03/2014: £108,111

Transform Funders
We would like to express our gratitude to all the individual donors and charitable trusts that support our work. We are particularly grateful to our long-term supporters, Henry Hoare, Paul Birch and Ken Aylmer, as well as the following trusts: the Open Society Foundations, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Allen Lane Foundation, the Linnet Trust, the Glass-House Trust and the JP Getty Jnr Charitable Foundation

Transform Board
Transform is a charitable foundation overseen by a board of Trustees: Roger Golland (Chair), John Moore (Treasurer), Paul Birch, Julia Buxton, John Whitaker, Clive Bates and James Varty

Transform Staff
Caroline Pringle, Chief Executive (left post October 2014)
Jane Slater, Operations and Fundraising Manager
Amanda Harper, Operations and Finance Assistant
Martin Powell, Head of Campaigns
Danny Kushlick, Head of External Affairs
Steve Rolles, Senior Policy Analyst
George Murkin, Policy and Communications Officer
Lisa Sánchez, Latin American Programme Manager
Aram Barra, Latin American Programme Officer

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of all our interns and volunteers